Perversity

FRANCIS CARCO

FORD MADOX FORD

ST. PROCOPIUS
COLLEGE LIBRARY
Lisle, Ill.

GIFT COLLECTION

No. 452

PRESENTED BY

The Rev.A.E.Komara
1935

26278
Carco

St. Procopius
College Library
LISLE, ILL.

All borrowers are expected to
acquaint themselves with the library
regulations printed on book marks,
which may be obtained at the cir-
culation desk.

Perversity

Perversity

BY

Francis Carco

TRANSLATED BY

Ford Madox Ford

CHICAGO
Pascal Covici, Publisher
MCMXXVIII

843.9
C265p

Copyright, 1928, by Pascal Covici, Publisher, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

26278

Perversity

I

IRMA'S room was at the end of a narrow passage, on the right, and to get to it one passed a door which was always shut. The girl would say to each new client: "Don't make a noise, *voyons!*"

"Why?"

"He's asleep."

"Who is?"

"My brother." She explained that her brother worked as a clerk in an office and went off very early in the morning.

Then she would add quickly: "But don't be afraid, darling. In my room we'll be quite quiet, and you know, I'll undress."

Irma the red haired was not lying. Emile had

lived with her for five years, on the fourth floor of that house where at nightfall prostitutes of all ages went up and down accompanied by strange men. The women lived in an utterly careless disorder. The miserable staircase was lit by oil lamps and smelt abominably of drains, the damp walls were covered with scratches, the doors were badly fitting, the floors uneven. Thus they had always lived and their sordid surroundings were a part of themselves. Irma was accustomed to it all.

She was a rather pretty girl, small, plump, carelessly gay, still young, nicknamed La Rouque, the Red One, because of the red gold hair which she wore cut short at the nape of her neck. She was used to this brother older than herself, he was a part of her life. He slept most of the time, she tried not to disturb him, and thought no more of him.

She was generally to be found on the Boulevard de Grenelle, under the high, funeral-like gallery of the Metro, or at Jules in the Rue de l'Avre, a bar frequented by colored men, who, on a Saturday would wait there for her.

In order to be sure of a certain sum, she had made the whole band a fixed price for that evening, and though it was sometimes difficult, she kept her engagement strictly and never disappointed one of them.

All next day she would sleep, a heavy sleep which looked like death—a murder.

In the next room Emile also slept. On Sundays he stayed in bed till six or seven o'clock. Then he got up, went out, ate in a restaurant and spent the evening at a cinema.

Tall, round shouldered, taciturn, always tidily dressed in clothes too large for him and shiny with wear, he had neither acquaintances nor friends. He lived a solitary life organized to fit in with his hours of work. Every morning at seven o'clock he descended his four flights of stairs, every evening at dinner-time he mounted them again, and the Ladies whom he met on the staircase, without seeming to notice them, never once happened to find him late.

The street was black, almost deserted. Here and there badly lit shops threw oblique, reddish gleams on to the pavements.

"Yes," resumed one of the women. "I don't care for that man."

"Neither do I."

"Types like that," declared a third, "don't talk much, they do things on the quiet. *Ou-la-la!* I've known some others of the sort. One does not even know that they are there. Then one day *pan!* and their portrait in all the newspapers."

"You are right."

"Unless they take to drink," concluded an innocent and very ancient creature who was derisively known as Belle-Amour—Pretty Love.

"Drink saves them from themselves. They are nice when they are drunk." And Belle-Amour's face lit up at the enlivening idea of drink.

She had a real adoration for Emile. A man so exact in his habits astounded her. Also she admired him because instead of living upon La Roque, and notwithstanding his air of sullen suffering, he went every day to his office, he came back every night without fail at a fixed hour.

In the evening she watched from the street for his return, and when his mean figure appeared she was quite moved. Nevertheless she did not dare to speak to Emile, who with his uncertain gait would enter the passage and climb the stairs. She listened to him going up, crossed the street and watched the fourth story window light up. Then she would begin her walk up and down past the black houses, a shadow from which people drew back.

* * *

Up in his room Emile hung his cap on a nail in the passage.

"Is that you?" called Irma.

"Yes, yes, it's me."

After he had taken off his coat, he said to her in his small falsetto voice: "Good evening."

She answered, "Good evening."

Emile never went into his sister's room. From his own room he would pass into the narrow kitchen where he took off his shoes; they were heavy, iron nailed, and fell noisily on to the stone floor. And that was all. The man put on his slippers, then silently pulled a knife out of

his pocket, took bread and wine from a cupboard, and a plate upon which was a piece of cold meat or of cheese, sat down. . . . He ate like this every evening, leaning on the table as if on a desk, cutting the bread and meat on his thumb absent-mindedly, and chewing his food with effort.

From her room, Irma could see him under the crude gas-light and sometimes he watched her while she dressed, with sad and vacant eyes. He stared at her as an animal stares at things and people. What could he be thinking of? Not that Irma bothered about him, and when she had gone out and shut the door behind her, Emile went on eating silently and poured himself out a glass of wine.

He felt more at his ease when he was alone, calculated with seriousness the best way to make himself comfortable, yawned, meditated. The man had an abnormal need of sleep and this gave him, even when he was awake, a morose and dreamy expression.

Sometimes it took him longer than a blind man to stand up or move, and when he hurried

he seemed to be groping uncertainly in the dark. He had to plan everything he did carefully, and his effort was quite out of proportion to the very small result obtained.

This singularity was obvious from the first, but one got used to his painful and complicated method of seeking himself in the shadows as it were, and one ceased to notice it.

* * *

There was something alarming about Emile at first sight, his big body, his long legs, his expression of stupefaction, his drooping moustaches of an ugly yellow. He terrified the children of the Quarter, they instinctively avoided him. Though he was so harmless, all the little servant girls going on their errands stopped disconcerted if they met him, and prudently drew aside to let him pass. He went on his way without even looking at them.

Even Irma, when she heard him coming, would often shiver a little with fear.

However she knew Emile, and she was used to his strangeness. She had always noticed that look of an automaton which secretly repelled

everybody with whom he came in contact. His first wife, now dead, had all her life tried vainly to conquer the morbid numbness that estranged him from everything. He had not changed. At the age of thirty-five, in June, 1914, Emile married again—a widow who first betrayed him and finally left him after the war to go and live with a Belgian in his country. Emile did not seem at all affected by this event, and merely went to live in a hotel. Sometime afterwards he suggested to his sister, apparently for motives of economy which she shared, that they should live together, and he settled in her lodgings.

II

HE thought that he was in a place where, notwithstanding Irma's comings and goings, his comfort would be the first consideration. Then one night, towards midnight, he was awakened by an unusual noise. Emile listened. In La Rouque's room a man was talking without troubling to lower his voice, and the girl—far from silencing the speaker—answered with animation. Once or twice Emile heard a laugh, and protested by a grunt.

"*Hé chut! chut!*" then said Irma, but too late. Emile was awake. He sat up in bed and asked weakly: "Is this noise going on for long?"

Someone answered at once: "No, no, all right."

"Annoying people!" grumbled Emile. "Keeping people from sleeping!"

He waited, leaning on his elbow, then plunged into the bedclothes and shut his eyes. But he could not sleep. He tossed and turned, and perhaps for the first time began to picture his sister with a stranger—laughing and talking. He had never till the present moment dwelt on the thought of Irma in her room accomplishing her nightly task. But because he had been disturbed in his sleep, Emile confusedly began to imagine the scene which was taking place on the other side of the partition. He was not shocked. He was irritated, filled with ill temper and discontent. Certainly what Irma did was not his business, but why was she making such a noise? It was intolerable. At this time of night Emile did not admit this loud talking. Were they laughing at him? Did they mean to be personally disagreeable to him?

He grumbled: "If it begins again I'll——"

The idea that they were doing it on purpose was provoking, and he was on the point of telling his sister that she must keep quiet, when a

moaning sound, at first almost inaudible, but which grew louder, came from the next room, and Emile knew no more what to think. It was Irma moaning, and to her complaint the creaking of the bed added a cynical and degrading confession.

Then all that had gone before became precise to Emile's eyes, assailed him with such force that he dared ask himself nothing more. "Ah well," he thought, "well . . . well . . . Surely." His wrath cooled down, and gave place to a feeling of stupor which increased as Irma's sighs became more numerous and hoarser. The sounds reached him through the partition, as in a hospital the panting breath of a sick man dreaming can be heard by the helpless person in the next bed. Emile found himself in an exactly similar situation. He was unable to do anything, and could only wait for La Rouque to stop crying out from the next room her detestable and painful pleasure. Then she sometimes found pleasure? Emile felt humiliated at the idea. And with whom? He was curious about the unknown man. What could he be like? It was extraordi-

nary. Emile could not picture him. The more he thought about it the more complex became his imaginings, his brain accumulating a hundred preposterous, grotesque and unlikely details.

Sometimes he told himself that there could be nothing very special about the individual. Sometimes on the contrary, Emile imagined him with striking features, and an air which would force every one to notice him. And this idea was a very painful one. It was tormenting, for in order to react he was unconsciously comparing himself and opposing himself to the unknown. Alas! Emile had never given pleasure to a woman. He had done his best. But no! Never! Never to a single one. He had married two indolent and vulgar creatures: one had frankly disliked "the business," the other had betrayed him the day after his marriage, and in his own house. Women were a detestable lot. Evidently he could have consoled himself with somebody else, but this he did not dream of doing. He thought far too highly of his own modest person to risk another adventure. The girls of the street

did not tempt him. As for the women who awaited his choice in the different brothels of the quarter, the thought of them disgusted instead of pleasing him.

He sincerely felt that the best way of dealing with women was to carefully avoid them, to keep them at a proper distance. Once seduced by one of the creatures, what did a male become? A nincompoop. An imbecile. He knew it. He had paid dearly to know it—too dearly for what it was worth. *Ou-la-la!* Too dearly. Much too dearly . . . And from that experience had come his need to live alone, to avoid people, to occupy himself with his own comfort, to shut himself up every night at nine o'clock in his room and sleep. People could think what they liked about him. So much the better. At any rate he was left in peace; and that was all he wanted. All his unhappiness had been caused by those two beings and they were associated in his mind—the dead woman and the unfaithful one. He condemned them both with severity.

And now, just when he had hoped to arrange some possible sort of existence, Irma had inter-

fered and reopened the whole question. Emile felt that he was losing his temper, and if he made an effort to be patient, it was because of an obscure sentiment which he had for his sister, and of which, secretly, he was ashamed. Did La Rouque know that from his room he could hear everything that went on? She certainly did. And this sad certainty increased Emile's irritation, obliged him to realize that Irma, when she felt so inclined, did not bother about a soul except herself. The whole night passed in this way. The man said something, got up, lay down again. Irma answered him and in her turn got up. The noise of water being poured out of the basin, of bare feet on the floor, succeeded to all the other noises. Then everything began all over again, and Emile meanwhile heard the ticking of his watch hung on the wall and wondered what the time was. He grumbled, agitated. What a night! It seemed to him that it would never end. The blood throbbed in his temples. The nerves knotted themselves in his legs and hands. He stiffened himself in vain, it was impossible to keep still; and when the dawn, a

thousand times delayed—so he thought—paled between the shutters, it found him with wide open eyes amongst his disordered sheets, and his coverlet rolled into a ball. Emile got up quickly. He felt broken with fatigue, like those torpid animals whom one can see every morning moving between the shafts of the carts in the Halles as if they were walking in their sleep. He dressed himself, went into the kitchen, took his shoes. The sink smelt abominably badly. He went back into his room. He acted mechanically, without thinking of what he was doing. An idea, strong, deeply rooted, had taken possession of him: he wished to see and never forget the man who was now sleeping at Irma's side. This idea was absorbing and paralyzing. He stared at the shoes in his hand for a long time, thinking of the unknown, and telling himself over and over again that now at last he would know what he was like. However he could not quite make up his mind. Something which he could not quite define stopped him, held him back. . . .

Suddenly the clattering of the milkman's cart, which woke him every morning, sounded from

the street. Emile recovered himself. He realized that everything inside him and around him was getting to work again. He placed his shoes under a chair with care, went softly into the passage, opened Irma's door, approached the bed slowly and looked. The man and the girl were lying asleep. He was stretched out on his back quite naked, his mouth open, one arm thrust under the pillow; she was buried like a dead person under a big eiderdown.

Emile looked closer. The sleeper's chest was covered with blue tattoo marks. A hand of Fatma and a dagger ornamented the left arm. Emile noticed also near the wrist three stars, cut deeply, and a name—Gilberte. Underneath were the letters P. L. V.

He asked himself what these mysterious letters could mean. He had not the least idea. And after all what did it matter? Emile had eyes only for the man stretched out inert on the bed. His hair was frizzy and he seemed to be small but robust. Emile was going to leave the room when he noticed particularly a long scar on the right side—of rose so pale that it astonished him.

III

EMILE did not speak to his sister when he came in that evening. He shut himself up at once in the kitchen and took off his shoes. La Rouque let him alone. She did not wish to argue and was completely indifferent to Emile's bad temper. So much the worse for him. What an idea to behave like a child. At his age!

"Go on. Go on," she said to herself, "sulk if you want to. Make a fool of yourself. We'll see what will be the end of it; you bet I don't care."

She was repeating in a low voice: "Make a fool of yourself. Yes, yes, that's it—make a fool of yourself," when the door opened and Emile asked: "What are you mumbling about?"

"Oh, shut up and leave me alone!"

"Come here," said Emile.

La Rouque was standing before a piece of broken looking-glass nailed to the wall, gazing at herself.

"Do you hear me?" repeated Emile angrily.

"Well, what is it?" she said without moving. "You've got the jumps this evening."

"Filth!"

"Filth?"

The girl turned.

"Why do you insult me?" she asked. "What right have you to insult me?"

"Right or no right," he answered, "I don't care. Understand me well. I won't have it. I won't stand lt. You're not going to start last night over again, I tell you. Not in this house."

"Who—me?"

"Yes."

"But last night," answered La Rouque, "was not my fault. I had some one with me. No—but joking apart, you'll allow me, when I have a man to sleep with, not to spit on him.

"Oh, that's enough, that's enough!" shouted

Emile. "What do you take me for? Those sorts of men are better left outside."

La Rouque began to laugh.

"Stop laughing," said Emile walking up to her. He was becoming more and more angry. "You're mad . . . quite. Do you think . . ."

"*Hé la,* I warn you," said Irma coolly, "that if you touch me, I'll give it to you back."

"What?"

"I will," she declared. "Monsieur is not pleased, and he must make a noise about it. No, no, my old boy. Nothing doing."

Emile stopped stupefied. She went on: "This place belongs to me to begin with, and I'll do what I like in it."

"That means?"

"It means," explained Irma quietly, "that if I want to bring anybody here for the night, I'll bring him."

"Irma!"

"Irma—nothing. You heard what I said."

She went back to her looking-glass, took a comb and began to comb her hair, keeping an eye on Emile who stupidly shook his head and

panted with rage. She threw her hair back and smoothed it on to her forehead.

"Oh you're pretty," he mocked, "you're a sweet thing."

"Possible."

"Certain," said Emile. "It's true that anything is good enough for the dirty dog who was here last night."

La Rouque smiled.

"Yes, a dirty dog," repeated Emile under his breath. "You can be proud of him."

"And what of it?" asked La Rouque. "Do you want me to tell him what you say about him?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, wait a bit and you'll see," she announced quietly. "He'll teach you to call him a dirty dog. He won't be long about it, that one . . . But after all, why should I argue with you?" she added, suddenly changing her mind. "Run away, poor old boy. Go back to your room and stay there. It'll be the best."

She pushed him outside gently, laughing at the idea of repeating Emile's imprudences to the

man she was awaiting. He went without protesting, and having got him as far as the door, she took him by the shoulders, thrust him suddenly into the kitchen, and went back to her dressing.

Emile hung his head, he sat down sadly in a corner and laying his elbows on the edge of the table he meditated mournfully and bitterly. Above his head, the butterfly-shaped flame of the gas burned with a slight hissing noise. Emile did not hear it. He was thinking over what he had said to La Rouque and he felt anxious.

All at once the door bell rang and he started up, but Irma was already rushing to the door.

"Don't disturb yourself," she threw at him. "It's somebody for me." Emile regained his self possession.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Nobody . . . Nobody . . ." answered Irma.

A conversation began in the entry, then Irma reappeared, and shut the door of the kitchen to prevent Emile from seeing the person she was introducing into her room.

"Ah, *par exemple!*" grunted Emile. "I won't

allow that . . . Certainly . . . not . . . no . . . She's laughing at me—she's making a fool of me . . . it's . . . it's . . ."

He stuttered with anger and for a moment did not know what to do. Then rage overcame him. He made one impulsive movement across the passage and without thinking of knocking at the door in front of him, he opened it noisily.

"Well! here's the brother," a man said joyfully, the same man he had seen in bed that morning. "So he's not asleep for once."

Emile became very pale.

"Yes, it's me," he declared.

"And then?"

"You can't stay here," said Emile, seizing the man by the arm. "You must go."

"Just like that?"

"You must go at once."

"I don't think so," answered the man. He disengaged himself without effort, then, looking at Emile with curiosity: "I'm in Madame's room," he went on drawling, "and I don't see why I should go."

Irma interfered: "Bébert, *allons!*" she mur-

mured very quickly. "Be reasonable for him, as he is so stupid. Don't make a scene about it. Everything can be arranged without quarreling."

"No," affirmed Emile, "there's no question of an arrangement."

Bébert tittered.

"But he's a *rigolo,*" he announced very much at his ease. "A funny one. Why didn't you tell me? A perfect gentleman. But he's trying it on the wrong man. I shan't go."

"What?"

"*Tiens!* Like this!" said Bébert, seizing Emile's wrists quickly. "I don't like to be made a fool of—D'you see, boaster——"

"Don't hurt him," Irma was saying. "Let him alone I tell you . . . Bébert!"

Emile struggled.

"Like this," repeated Bébert coldly, and squeezing Emile's wrists more tightly, he twisted them. "Ah, you see . . . You mustn't brag if you can't back it up."

"Bébert . . ."

"Just a minute," answered Bébert." He must

beg my pardon first, then I'll buy him a drink . . . I'm not a bad sort . . . nothing liverish about me . . . But when there's something to be done I do it . . . Come on—you!"

Emile moaned.

"Beg my pardon," said Bébert.

"Let me go."

Emile fought, but vainly. He tried to bite and Bébert, pushing him into the corner, forced him to kneel down.

"Now will you beg my pardon?"

"No!"

"Ah, you won't? Well, so much the worse for you," announced Bébert, who was much amused. He squeezed, he increased his pressure, and this time Emile collapsed on to the floor writhing with pain.

"Don't make that noise . . . shut up . . . or . . ."

Irma watched the scene silently. She felt a vague pity for her brother, but she was full of admiration for Bébert and thought he was right.

"Well," she said suddenly, "don't be obstinate, Emile . . . Beg his pardon . . . It's

no use fighting now . . . come on—say it . . . say that you . . . won't do it again."

"Pardon," moaned Emile . . . "pardon . . . you're hurting me too much."

"Naturally," observed Bébert.

He let Emile go, who, instead of getting up, sat down and began to weep.

"That's what comes of not listening to me . . . now, don't cry, the brother, and come on . . . I'll stand you a drink downstairs."

He hitched up his trousers, pulled his cap down over his eyes and taking a fag from the depths of his little black waistcoat pocket, stuck it on to his lip.

"Are you coming?" he proposed.

"Better leave him alone," answered Irma. "He never drinks. Don't force him."

"Just as he likes," said Bébert obligingly, lighting his cigarette. "We two, we'll trot to the *bistro*, kid, then we'll go to a *musette*. Good night, Emile."

"Good night," repeated Emile with cowardice.

"But I warn you," said Bébert as he was going, "if you take it into your head to be dis-

agreeable when we come in, look out! I'm not a windbag. You'll find me all there—true as I'm alive, and it wont be a pretty business."

* * *

Emile sat alone on the floor, while the couple went downstairs. Huge tears, which he did not trouble to wipe away were running down his cheeks. His red swollen wrists hurt him. He tried to move them and cried out with pain.

"Oh, the brute," he groaned.

He was in pain, in great pain, and he suffered not only from his wrists but from the humiliation inflicted upon him by Bébert.

"Yes," he muttered, "the brute . . . The . . . the brute! The dirty dog." However, he got up and, not knowing what to do with himself, went back into the kitchen and, mechanically economical, lowered the gas. The sight of a bottle of wine, plates, a piece of bread and cheese on the table invited him to sit down. Emile pushed the stool aside with his knee, cleared the table, stopped crying, became calm. "What a shame!" he told himself.

He went into his room, then turned round

and came back again. He moved slowly, indifferently to all appearance, looking round him carefully but with a lost expression.

Near his bed was a lamp without a shade which modestly lit up the walls and looking-glass, two chairs and the mantlepiece. Emile began to lament, he felt so unhappy that nothing could give him courage.

It did not even occur to him to leave the house. Where should he go to? Everything crushed and frightened him, and whenever he tried to reason with himself, the image of Bébert would rise up in his mind and prevent him from making a decision.

IV

HE awaited the return of his sister and Bébert in this extraordinary state of agitation, looking out of the window at the street, where the shadows of the women who paraded to and fro offering themselves to the passers-by seemed inordinately lengthy. Emile recognized some of these women by their showily colored coats, but he thought steadily about Irma, and gradually the thought became less painful.

In fact, by one of those sudden changes of mind which are so difficult to explain, he had ended by choosing the greater of two evils, and he told himself that it would be easier to bear Bébert's tortures than the anticipation of them. The idea helped him to struggle against his

wish to sleep, moreover it gave him a kind of appetite for the violences he was preparing for.

However Bébert and the girl did not come in. Midnight struck, then the half hour, then one o'clock. The street, where even the shadows seemed weary, was a long narrow perspective of closed shopwindows. There were no passers-by. A cold wind raised little eddies of dust at the foot of the building and swept the pavements with stray pieces of paper. It shook against the coiffeur's shop—a small copper plate adorned with a long tail of black horse hair. The plate creaked. So did an invisible and rusty weather-cock. In the silence Emile noticed these desolate noises of the night, and he ended by staring blindly at the shadows hurrying past the walls. Then his attention was attracted by a woman whom he had not seen before. She was standing under a streetlamp, upright and attentive, looking at the window in Emile's room.

He was surprised, and drew the curtain aside.

"Ah *tiens!*" said she, "it's the old woman."

It was Belle-Amour who was standing there. Belle-Amour? Why? Emile was disconcerted.

What did the woman want of him? What was she waiting for? He was quite unable to imagine, and this irritated and vexed him. At length he began to feel ashamed of her presence there, and he was going to let the curtain drop, when a taxi turned the angle of the street and stopped under the window. Bébert and Irma appeared.

Emile in spite of himself at once began to tremble and whimper. He crawled on all fours under the bed, and lay there listening to every sound. He was very pale, and as he heard them coming up the stairs he repeated to himself that they were surely going to pull him out of his hiding place and beat him unmercifully. His teeth chattered. His forehead, his whole body, was covered with sweat and when the key turned in the lock, he thought that his loudly hammering heart would burst.

However, nothing of all this happened . . . Irma shut the door gently behind her and went with Bébert into her room. Neither of them spoke. Emile strained his ears to listen. Why were they so quiet? Did they wish to make him feel falsely secure, then take advantage of him?

The unhappy creature did not know what to think. It seemed to him that their silence must be part of some horrible design. He was certain of it. Under the bed, Emile huddled close to the wall, for his fear was so great that it deprived him of every vestige of common sense. And he shivered in every limb. He tortured himself with fear. He found as it were an extraordinary delight in doing so.

So sleep fell on him, a heavy sleep peopled till dawn with phantoms that crushed him. Emile woke up when the milkman's cart clattered under the window. He emerged from the uncomfortable hiding place, dipped his face and hands in water, then discontented with himself, he brushed his clothes and went to his work. The remembrance of this grotesque night went with him. He coughed. He had taken cold under the bed. It was absurd. Emile felt small, humiliated. He thought of Bébert and reproached himself for being frightened, but the fear was still there.

The little man was too calm, too self possessed. He was terrifying. Precisely on account of that serene self control in which Emile him-

self was so lacking. Why had Irma been caught by this person who was not suited to her? Emile could not get over it. A man who was a good for nothing. Under his assured air and his impersonal ways of talking, one could see that at once. What a business! As Emile wrote he pictured Bébert, and wondered fearfully what the result of this individual's presence in their home would be. Nothing good, assuredly. He remembered him lying in Irma's bed, his tattooings, his frizzled hair, the scar on his side, and the remembrance was not precisely comforting. On the contrary. Emile felt disguested, and to his disgust was added the oppressive conviction of his own helplessness.

However, in the evening he would have to go home as usual and in spite of all he had vowed to do if he were ill treated as on the previous day, he dreaded finding Bébert with Irma. What could he say? And Bébert? Already Emile felt very uneasy. He went home as slowly as possible, and far from giving him courage, this increased his uneasiness. At last he made up his mind, but he was late for the first time since he

had lodged with his sister, and Belle-Amour told herself that something very dreadful must be going to happen.

When Emile appeared Bébert, stripped to the waist, was in the kitchen washing himself at the sink.

"*Salut,*" said he.

In her room Irma was singing.

The remains of a meal of sausages and cheese were on the table, and a half empty, uncorked bottle of rum. Emile stood contemplating the disorder.

"Will you have a drop of schnick?" proposed Bébert. "Help yourself."

"No, thank you," answered Emile severely.

Bébert was splashing water all over the kitchen. He scrubbed and snorted under the open tap, shivering as the cold water trickled over him. Emile left the place to him.

Irma said: "Come here and sit down. He won't be long now. What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

"Nothing is the matter."

"*Ben*—sit down then."

"I'm not tired," said Emile.

Irma looked at him.

She said: "You wouldn't sulk if you knew what a good sort Bébert is. And the proof of it is that last night he took his shoes off so that you should not hear him come in. *Hein?* That's something, isn't it? And today he went out to buy something to eat and a bottle of rum. Oula-la! You don't find many men as delicate as that. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes," answered Emile.

He stood leaning against the door post, and listened to Irma without understanding a word she said. It was painful to see his dejected face, his mournful disillusioned eyes, his long carcass bent in two.

"He's got nothing against you," added Irma. "He's rather vexed about what happened last night. I swear he told me that he did it when he was in a bad temper and that he's wild with himself. But you stood up to him and he doesn't take that from anybody. People of that sort can't help themselves. They're too nervous."

"Yes, yes," said Emile bitterly.

At that moment Bébert, still streaming with water, came into the room from the kitchen. Irma handed him a towel and, as he dried himself, Emile considered him in silence, astounded at the liberties this man took in a place where he had been so short a time. It was too much. Emile shook his head.

Then, looking at his sister, he demanded if anybody meant to put the kitchen in order.

"I'll tidy it up," said Irma.

"When?"

Bébert finished drying himself. He took his shirt from the bed, pulled it over his head, then slowly, as if he were talking to himself: "I don't see," he declared, "why Irma should tidy it."

"Ah! All right," said Emile disconcerted.

Irma was already hurrying out of the room, anxious to avert a scene.

"Stay here," ordered Bébert. "There is a way of asking for things. The kitchen is clean enough as it is. I don't care."

"Oh—clean . . ."

This was Emile.

Bébert started up.

"That's enough," said he in a tone which did not admit of an answer. "And it's the last time I'll say it." And he slammed the door so brutally that Emile jumped back just in time to avoid being hit in the face.

He took refuge in his room without argument, pale with anger at his new insult, and not knowing how to defend himself. The curious thing was that, though Emile felt offended, he reproached himself with the bad temper which had made him speak to his sister so stupidly. He had been conscious of his clumsiness and unable to help it. He had realized that he was being arrogant and could not stop himself. Why? Nothing obliged him to be impertinent. No, nothing . . . yet he acknowledged to himself that he should like to do it all over again. Far from regretting his stupidity, he was proud of it, and this pride intoxicated him and excited in him a secret pleasure because he had at last done something to deserve his burning humiliations.

Bébert as he finished dressing announced to Irma: "He's looking for trouble—that chap.

All right, he won't have to look long. Did you hear his idiocies? I'll break him."

And Irma declared: "He has always been like that."

"And you've stood it?"

"Bah! He's a poor thing!"

"I should call him a poison," concluded Bébert.

Emile, listening behind the door, could barely restrain himself from answering. A poison! A poison, he repeated in a low voice, and then? He was no longer afraid. He felt so indignant that if Bébert had tried to come into his room he would have opened the door and shouted a thousand insults. But Bébert did not think of doing any such thing. He went off quietly with Irma whilst Emile burst into the kitchen as if he had suddenly gone mad. He broke all the plates, the glasses, and the bottle of rum on the table, and, filled with rage, began to pick up the pieces.

V

THIS brought him to his senses, and obliged him to consider matters more calmly. He began to wonder why he had raged for so futile a reason and was filled with consternation and self-pity. They had driven him wild, hadn't they? They had offended him, provoked him unbearably. If it had not been for Bébert, none of it would have happened. It was his fault, Emile abominated him. Why did he interfere? To behave in such a fashion the man must be without tact: a cad, a lout. Why had he stopped Irma from putting the kitchen in order when she had agreed to do it?

Emile knelt, mopping up the tile floor, and cursed the endless task. With rancour he told

himself that everything was against him . . . everything. Even the smell of rum, which he detested, and which made him feel sick.

Life was becoming impossible, and the most glaring proof of that was the haste he was making to wipe up the rum that had spread and soaked into everything. The unhappy man told himself that fear of Bébert drove him. He was afraid, that was the most annoying part of it all. Ever since that individual had taken up his abode in their lodgings, Emile had lived in a stupefying state of fright, devoured by a perpetual anxiety which did not leave him one moment of peace.

Standing upright and mournfully inspecting the kitchen he had cleaned, he asked himself if he had succeeded in hiding every trace of the damage he had done. Not for anything in the world would he have wished it to be visible. He had put the broken pieces of the bottle, the plates and the glasses into the rubbish-box and now he stood with the box in his hand seeking a place where it could be pushed, a place where no one would see it.

The most simple thing would certainly be to put it back under the sink, but there Irma would discover it easily. Emile felt exceedingly embarrassed. He scratched his head, grunted, then not able to think of a better solution, he decided to empty it into the *concierge's* dust bin downstairs, and bring it up again. He went down on tiptoe and arrived on the ground floor. The passage that led to the street was obscure, and Emile peered cautiously before he risked entering it, then he decided to trust to luck and found himself outside. The street was deserted, the paving stones glistened under an icy drizzle. Emile went along close to the wall, reached the dust bin and emptied his box carefully. Then he felt reassured and told himself that nobody would now guess what had happened. He re-entered the house and had begun to climb up to his rooms, when a door which gave directly on to the narrow entrance passage opened, and Belle-Amour appeared. Emile was obliged to stand aside. The woman recognized him. She stopped and said: "*Tiens!* Monsieur Emile."

"Good evening," answered Emile. "I came

downstairs to empty my dust bin."

"Yes," murmured Belle-Amour. "Isn't this bad weather a nuisance?"

"It is a nuisance certainly," said Emile.

He made as though to go on his way.

Belle-Amour asked: "How is it that you have to empty the dust bin?"

"There's no shame in doing it," declared Emile, out of countenance.

"You're quite right."

He repeated: "No shame at all."

"Oh," said Belle-Amour. "You are not the man to complain. People like you, who understand life, are never ashamed of anything. I know that you are above all that."

Emile hung his head.

"But La Roque?" asked the old woman, emboldened by the turn this incoherent conversation was taking. "She lets you do it?"

"My sister had forgotten."

"Ah—well."

"So you see . . ."

"It is nice of you," said Belle-Amour, "to save her trouble . . . yes . . . it's really nice . . .

So, although I've never spoken to you before, I don't want to hide from you . . . that people in this house think a lot of you, they esteem you."

Emile did not know what to answer. He balanced his box at arm's length, smiled, lowered his head. "Ah," he said stupidly, "I thank you——" He flushed scarlet and added: "What you say makes me feel very happy."

Belle-Amour in her turn seemed confused. She was moved, perplexed, filled with a strange tenderness. Emile intimidated her. She did not know which way to look, standing there between the narrow walls of the passage which was swept by a cold draught. The umbrella hanging on her arm, the handbag in her hand, embarrassed her.

Moreover the presence of Emile so close to her in the shadow gave her a dream-like feeling, plunged her into a delicious stupor which prevented her from understanding anything of this happening.

"Well," resumed Emile, "I must leave you; I've got to get upstairs."

Belle-Amour was silent.

"D'you hear that?" he asked awkwardly.

He was listening attentively to the sound of steps approaching from the street, and he longed to escape.

"Come into my room," proposed Belle-Amour rapidly. "Just for a moment so that they won't see you. They'll gossip if they think we are talking. Quick, quick—in here."

Emile felt utterly bewildered.

"In here," repeated the old woman pulling at his sleeve.

She dragged him in, shut the door.

"*Chut!*" she whispered. "It's the Nénette going up to her room. What luck! If that one had seen us, there would have been a lot of talk tomorrow. She has an evil tongue; she is a gossip."

Emile asked in a low voice: "Which is Nénette?"

"The one who wears a check coat and an oil-cloth hat. You've never noticed her?"

"No," said Emile, whose only idea was to get away. He felt his throat tighten with emotion,

and his heart beat loudly, heavily—it hammered in his chest.

"A horrible nature," explained Belle-Amour. "And as for being clean, well she isn't clean, she doesn't look after herself, she isn't tidy, her stockings are always full of holes."

"Ah! Is that so?"

"We were taken up together once and brought to Saint-Lazare. I can tell you that I saw something when they stripped us. *Ou-la-la!* . . . The sisters were disgusted."

Emile looked round him trying to think of something amiable to say before he took his leave. He remarked timidly: "It all looks very tidy in here."

"I could not live in a dirty place," answered Belle-Amour, who still stood near the door. "Everybody has their own character, haven't they? Isn't that so?"

Emile was silent.

"There is somebody else going upstairs," announced the old woman. "This time it's la Marquise, and drunk, naturally. Do listen to the way she's rattling her key against the walls. Yes,

she is with a man. Otherwise, she often comes to see me because I never let my stove out night or day. It is nice and warm in here, isn't it?"

"It is very nice and warm," allowed Emile.

"*Ben*, you are not in a hurry, stay a little longer," said Belle-Amour very quickly. "I can offer you some coffee. Will you? I'll get two glasses. Please sit down. No . . . I have coffee ready on the stove night and day. You can't refuse me. Why don't you wish to stay?"

"I have no reason," replied Emile harshly.

And before she could stop him, he was in the passage. He looked at her, said good night quickly, and went off almost at a run.

* * *

Emile hurried up the steps, and pale, breathless, agitated, double-locked himself in his room. Then he was obliged to sit down, and for two or three minutes everything seemed to turn round him in a grotesque and rapid dance. He felt giddy. A strange emotion had taken possession of him and prevented him from steadying his thoughts. He had never in his life felt so strongly about anything. A novel emotion.

Pleasure, discontent? He could not define it. Sometimes he thought of his delight when the old woman flattered him, then instantly he would feel anger and a subconscious irritation. He could not understand why she had wished him to stay longer with her. He felt suspicious. He wondered what her plan was. Why should she offer him coffee? He did not know her well enough to find the offer natural or to accept it. He never took coffee at night. It made him too nervous. Was that why she had insisted? Was she trying to make him talk about things which he did not wish anybody to know? Not again! Emile was not so stupid. And then what could he say? His difficulties with Bébert were nobody's business, interested nobody but himself. He was not going to confide in Belle-Amour. Not if he knew it!

"Ah, no! No!" he declared aloud, "no . . . no . . ."

The woman was extraordinary, but she was also cunning, like all women, thought Emile. Inquisitive. He pictured her with her hair ridiculously cut short *à la Ninon*, her thick waist, her

enormous hips. What did she want from him, after all? The innocent! She was running after him. *Parbleu!* That's what it was. Emile remembered having seen her that same evening gazing at his window from the street, and he laughed, he shouted with laughter, he wriggled with laughter, then stopped all at once, because a new and insupportable idea had occurred to him. The woman must love him to behave like that. Emile shook himself. The thought of love was too painful. He would have liked to thrust it aside, trample it down. But he could not. Then he got up and began to walk up and down the kitchen, not knowing how to escape from his memories. If he had dared, he would have gone downstairs to the old woman and begged her to leave him in peace. But what was the use? People in the house would hear of it and invent a hundred stories. And in this way the creature would be revenged . . . Emile knew all about such vengeances. He had already experienced them . . . the ridicule, the shame, the daily and nightly despair. Alas! Although he tried to stop himself from doing it, he began to live

again the dreadful moments he had known with his second wife. Had he loved her, that one? He could not tell. And the other, who constantly reproached him for his bad temper, who constantly complained about everything. He thought he heard her piercing voice, her grumblings, her lamentations.

The poor woman had never been happy with him. But what a life he had led her! He remembered the pleasure he used to feel, when he could irritate the insipid creature and quarrel with her about nothing. What? Was that all love was? Emile closed his eyes. Yes, he had loved her, perhaps cherished her, but in his fashion, with the diseased wish to torment and be odious to her. He could not love otherwise. That was his nature—a narrow, a selfish nature which caused him suffering because it forced him to always appear worried, sulky, discontented. Emile passed his hand heavily over his face; he was conscious of being the author of all his misery, he saw his fault everywhere and measured its extent, and an abrupt and painful change took place in him. He no longer wished to find

excuses for himself, but he tried on the contrary to reach by secret roads the innermost depths of his heart, the better to tear himself to pieces.

VI

THIS unforseen change made Emile still more suspicious and difficult to live with. When he came back from his office he would shut himself in his room and go to bed without taking any notice of Irma or of Bébert. He tried to sleep, and one night out of three he would succeed in doing so. On that night, Bébert could talk at the top of his voice, or sing if he were drunk. Emile heard nothing. He had fallen on his bed in a heavy mass, utterly exhausted by fatigue and nervousness.

Bébert was astounded.

"What about him?" he asked Irma. "Is he cracked?"

And when the girl approved: "I've never

known a man like that," said he seriously. "It's extraordinary. His way of going on is like nothing on earth. No, really, nothing whatever."

For Bébert the simple life of bars, balls and cinemas sufficed. His pleasures came to him through women. He worked at an electrician's shop when he had nothing better to do, and all the street girls and the women in the brothels of the quarter knew him. He betrayed the one with the other and made his living out of them. They called him "Go to bed Bébert" or mockingly "Only you," this being one of his favorite expressions when he was trying to seduce them by tender talk.

But none of them really cared for him. He was too fickle and spent too much money. As soon as he entered a dance hall, or regularly every afternoon in the brothels of the Military School quarter, he would hurry up to the newcomers and dazzle them with his eloquence and his offers of drinks. When he sang his success was great. This sturdy little man with frizzled hair, a rascal's eye and a warm voice was magnificent as he stood in the midst of the women

and sang, for instance, the chorus of the Battaillionnaires, the African battalion, where he had served as a soldier. It borrows the tune of the old: *Pan! Pan! l'Arbi!*

There was silence in the room, and Bébert, his cap over his eyes, would begin:

Pan, rataplan
Au revoir à tous les parents
Aux frangins, aux gosses affranchies
A la mom Chôcot qui fait des chichis
A la Louise, à la grand Clara
A la Rouquine et ceatera
Mais toi la bell 'goss quest-c' que tu prendas
Quand on r'viendra.

"Go on, Bébert!" the girls said encouragingly.

And they cried bravo, applauded, and would pass him money under the table—the "ladies turn."

Bébert lived this enviable life for some time, but it could not last. One evening, precisely because of his success, a man stabbed him in the ribs. Bébert recovered, but once out of hospital he hunted for his cowardly aggressor, met him on the Place St. Charles, and shot him like a

dog, three revolver bullets in the back.

"Not seen, not known and that's all right," Bébert would say when anyone spoke to him about the affair.

The joyous life began again, but his conquests now considered him dangerous. They mistrusted him, and to subsist, he was reduced to the most precarious expedients. Nobody in the quarter would employ him, and in the streets he terrorized those women whom he knew to be without a protector.

Bébert took money away from these feeble creatures, wasted it, hunted for a new victim. He wandered into the bars of Grenelle in search of adventures, sometimes alone, sometimes in the company of an enormous and red-faced individual who was known as Bouboule, or Red Face, or again The Tripe. Bouboule, a former boxer, was now a bookmaker. He wore a Cronstadt hat, leggings, colored shirts and he attracted clients by his good humor. Politeness was one of his charms, nevertheless, when he went along the boulevard with Bébert, all the women drew aside.

However, the partners had quite a good time. Sometimes they would watch the procession of men who were hunting for a woman, Chinese, Arabs, niggers. Sometimes they observed the comings and goings of the women and passed judgment on them. By this method they knew whom to deal with, and could often calculate up to twenty francs their share of the profit.

It was in this way that Bébert noticed Irma and told himself that she would suit him. He elbowed Bouboule.

"The red-haired girl over there?" he inquired.

"Bédame!"

The friends separated. Bébert followed Irma, discovered the bar in the Rue de l'Avre, the house where she lived and, after a few days of minute and patient inquiry, accosted the girl politely . . .

Then the joyous life for which he felt he was made began again, and all Irma's savings melted, for Bébert was determined not to deprive himself of anything. He conducted the girl to all the dance halls of the neighborhood,

took her to concerts in the cafés, to theatres, and very often to a bar in the Rue Frémicourt kept by a man named Titin. This bar was open until two o'clock in the morning. Irma was proud of Bébert. He was charming to her. He always knew how to arrange things, he spoke to everybody, and was really very presentable. Besides, he was able to give her pleasure. His good humor was contagious, irresistible. He displayed it on every occasion and when sometimes, a little intoxicated by this happiness to which she was not accustomed, the girl begged her companion to sing her an old song no longer heard at the *Caf' Conc'*, she did not have to ask twice. The languorous and sentimental air gave her a comforting sensation of rapture. She never got tired of it. As for the words, they were an enchantment.

Apres de longs jours de chômage
Comm' la môm' trouvait pas d'ouvrage
A s'laissa tomber un tantôt
Sur l'Sébasto.

Ah! What a beautiful song it was! It swayed,

as it were, to a slow and mournful rhythm. Bébert continued:

Pourtant marré de ses vacheries
Ainsi que d'ses paillassonn'ries
La môm scia son gars pour Pataud
Du Sébasto.

Toto n'pardonna pas son vanne
Pour s'venger un soir de tisane
Dans l'rape il lui mit son couteau
Sur l'Sébasto.

The end especially, Irma knew by heart, so bitter she thought it, so heavy with an obscure and nostalgic poetry.

La môm' chromit de sa blessure
Au travers Toto s'fit la l'vure
Ainsi finissent leurs zigotos
Au Sébasto.

The last verse was always sung in chorus and she repeated it seized by a strange emotion, sav-

age and tender. She shivered and abandoned herself: "Oh, Bébert," she sighed, "my man . . . my dear . . . *ma petite gueule* . . ."

"Put it there," he would say.

They kissed. Irma felt herself near to fainting. From the innermost depths of her nature rose a bitter and delicious sensation which lit her heart up, like those colored skyrockets that explode high in the night long after one has thought them dead. Could anything be compared with that? Was there anything else so sweet on earth? She would have sworn not, for in one moment, as if by a miracle, everything that the unfortunate girl had suffered was wiped out, her deceptions, her weariness, her endured humiliations. She was full of an immense fervor. In these moments she would have done anything to make sure of this happiness, she would have given all she possessed. But Bébert did not exact so much as all that. He simply deducted from Irma's earnings, the percentage to which he had a right, and he directed her, tried to give her a taste for her work. With Bouboule, who also had settled down, he sat in a bar not far from the

Rue de l'Avre and the Boulevard de Grenelle, the low ceilinged bar Tango. From this bar one could see the street. The friends played *belotte*, smoked, drank innumerable little glasses of alcohol, and their women joined them about midnight.

In the night full of haggardly red lights, under the flaming, cloud swept sky, the two couples departed, taking small steps, to eat at Titin's. Then they went back to their respective homes after the last glass drunk at the counter.

"*Au revoir*——" would say fat Bouboule. "Good night, Madame Irma."

"*Salut*," Bébert would answer.

And holding his Irma's arm, Bébert walked soberly along under an old umbrella.

It was then that he thought of Emile, and wondered at the stupidity of his existence.

"Bah! don't worry about it," proposed Irma. Bébert frowned.

"He's cracked," he affirmed. "Idiotic."

On certain evenings, the desire came to him to wake Emile up and ask him why he was sulking, and he would knock little knocks against

the wall and call out. Emile did not answer. He let Bébert knock, and with wide open eyes, waited for him to get tired.

"All right, all right," said Bébert. "Wait a bit." Emile's silence and reserve irritated Bébert. He thought that there must be some reason for them, and by degrees he began to believe that the tall stupid fellow was preparing some trick. But what trick? He was not afraid of Emile. But he reflected daily about the situation, which he felt was not quite clear. . . . For a whole week Bébert watched Emile, observing him as he observed a woman before he undertook her conquest, then finally he made up his mind.

"Come in here for a bit," he ordered one evening just when Emile was about to enter his room.

"Me?"

"Yes."

Emile asked if Bébert wanted to speak to him.

"Exactly," responded Bébert. "I want to

know what all this is about. I've let you alone long enough."

"But I don't disturb anybody," said Emile. "I don't see why . . ."

"Come here."

Emile was on the point of not obeying, but he thought better of it and yielded.

"Here I am," he said going into the kitchen where Bébert was sitting. "What do you want?"

They gazed at each other for a moment in silence and Bébert questioned: "What have you got against me?"

"What?"

"Don't try to be funny"—warned Bébert. "And don't try to be clever either! You heard what I said. Will you answer?"

"But I've nothing against you," declared Emile timidly. "Why? What have I done to make you think so?"

Bébert thumped the table violently with his fist. "Ah, you are going to ask questions," he exclaimed, furious. "You have the cheek to ask questions. It'll end badly, I tell you, if you take that tone with me." At the same time he

stared fixedly at Emile in order to intimidate him, and oblige him to talk.

Emile was looking at him, open-mouthed. He did not grasp at all why Bébert was shouting, why he was in such a rage.

"Well," said the other, "have you made up your mind?"

"Monsieur Bébert," stammered Emile. . . . "Don't get angry. It's not reasonable. I don't see . . . I don't understand . . . no never . . . I've never had anything against you . . . not yesterday any more than today. . . . Do you think . . . I'm not lying . . . I'm talking" (he placed his two hands on his heart) "just as you told me to, truly . . . sincerely . . ."

Bébert growled that all that was nonsense.

"Yes. . . . Yes . . . I'm not hiding anything," Emile went on more and more agitated. "What could I have against you? I live all alone here in my room. . . . I try not to disturb anybody. . . . How could I know that it wouldn't seem natural to you? When you call me in the night sometimes, I don't answer, on purpose. . . ."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want to have a row," said Emile after a second's hesitation. "You see? If, when you try to pick a quarrel with me, I was to let myself go, it would be awful."

"Perhaps you're right," approved Bébert who smiled in a satisfied way and seemed disarmed, "to keep yourself quiet. But when you shut yourself up in your room like that, it's not a life for me. What? Why can't you come and talk to us when you come home from your work?"

Emile drew back. His face was contracted, he averted his eyes.

"Look here," went on Bébert. "Nobody wants to eat you, but it gets on my nerves to have people sulking round me. I get it on the brain . . . I can't bear it."

"Ah!"

"Yes, I'm like that."

Bébert had quite cooled down. With a mechanical gesture he hitched his trousers up, stretched himself, then approaching Emile and putting a hand on his shoulder: "Let's be

friends," he proposed, clapping him with robust good nature on the back. "*Tiens!* I'm a pal—And from now on, I forget everything. I don't mind. That all right?"

Emile said in a very low voice: "It's all right, Monsieur Bébert."

"That's something like," exclaimed the other. "So, as tonight is Saturday and you don't go to work tomorrow—what do you say to this? We will go down to the bar Tango and meet one of my pals. I'll stand a bottle of fizz. Well, will you come?"

And as Emile showed no eagerness: "And I'd like," said Bébert, "to hear you say no! I'd consider it a slap in the face, and I warn you, I don't like that."

VII

THE wretched Emile never forgot that abominable evening. He accompanied Bébert, very reluctantly, to the bar Tango where Bouboule was waiting, and took an instant dislike to the fat man. He considered Bouboule's pink silk shirt, his cuffs with metal studs, his ridiculous Cronstadt hat with great annoyance, and thought him a self-satisfied and most unpleasant person. But Bébert having formally introduced them to each other, he was obliged to hide his uneasiness. Bouboule behaved in the most decorous manner possible, he called Emile "Monsieur Emile." and expressed himself with the uttermost politeness.

"I drink," he declared lifting his glass, "to

the harmony which should reign between brother and brother-in-law, and to Madame Irma's success in business."

Then he smacked his lips and added: "The wine of France, Monsieur Emile, no one's ever found anything better yet."

"This isn't bad, is it?" asked Bébert.

Emile agreed that it was very good.

Bouboule thought he ought to go one better.

"Nectar," he proclaimed emptying his glass.

He winked, smacked his lips a second time and, inclining the neck of the bottle, poured himself out some more, which he swallowed without stopping to take breath.

Emile was impressed. He looked at Bouboule with stupor and, not sure that his admiration was not stronger than his antipathy, declared: "If I drank like that I should soon be screwed."

"Oh not a bit of it," replied Bouboule with modesty. "A little wine doesn't hurt anybody."

Bébert began to laugh. He pushed Emile with his knee under the table and asked Bouboule: "How much of this could you hold?"

"At least five bottles."

"Five bottles!" exclaimed Emile.

"Certainly."

"Well," said Bébert, "I'll pay for them if you can drink them. Will you bet?"

Bouboule accepted and declared that the first bottle did not count. "Leave that out—So to win I must empty five others. You'll see. I can drink!"

"Patron!" called Bébert.

He gave the order, and the festival began.

The other clients of the bar crowded round. This performance interested them far more than affairs in Morocco or the rise and fall of the franc.

They shouted encouragements to Bouboule. They spoke in the most free and familiar fashion to Emile, taking him for what he was not, and Emile, seated among these men, suffered physically. He did not know how to remain unnoticed and far from being amused by the magnificent airs of Bouboule, he found him vulgar and repulsive.

Yet Bouboule was a superb sight. He swallowed one glass after another, after having

stirred the wine with one finger, big glasses filled to the brim and after each emptied bottle announced: "One . . . two . . . three. . . ."

He slowed down somewhat at the fourth bottle.

"Well Monsieur Bouboule," jeered the onlookers. "What the hell's the matter? Are you going to give in?"

Bouboule smiled.

"In Canada," he answered with an air of clownish superiority, "I drank forty whiskies at a go."

"In Canada?"

"I've been there," he affirmed. "And the proof of it is that to get the Montreal women over to the Americans, I used to marry each time in front the clergyman. It's a joke all the same."

Bébert put in his word: "Canada and Grenelle are two different places, cully!"

"Two?"

"Of course!"

"Well," said Bouboule disdainfully turning the fourth bottle upside down to show that it was empty, "that makes four."

"Bravo Bouboule!" shouted a shrill voice.

"Wait a bit," said Bouboule, whose one idea was to win his bet. "I can do what I said I would do. The bet was five bottles. Let it go!"

This bottle, the last, he uncorked himself and brandished it at arm's length for all to see, then silently, with effort, set to work. But he drank less easily, and his bulging eyes rolled in their sockets and became bloodshot. His heavy cheeked face grew purple. Once or twice he seemed on the point of giving in: he breathed heavily, wiped his mouth, and was obliged to display a fierce energy to get the glass to his lips. However, he held out to the end, and there was loud and well deserved applause when he threw the fifth vanquished bottle under the table and heaved a real sigh of relief.

Bébert, a good loser, held out a hundred franc note, and with a "Pay yourself," that made a sensation, got up and said: "Are we going to Titin's now?"

"But the women?" objected Bouboule.

At this word, Emile, in spite of himself, made the strange reflection that the note held out by

Bébert to the waiter had been earned by his sister.

"Well, what about the women?"

Bouboule explained: "Well yes. What would they think if they didn't find us here later on when they come?"

He turned to Emile and added: "Monsieur Emile thinks as I do. We can't behave like that to the ladies. It wouldn't be correct."

Bébert told him laughing, that he was certainly drunk.

Then he took Bouboule by the arm, hoisted him on to his legs and in the street declared: "It's for your sake, you dirty dog, that I wanted to make a move. You need a breath of air after all that fizz. Let yourself go. We'll get back to the bar for the women when it's time. We can take a stroll till then."

There was a touching comradeship between them, for Bouboule did not walk very straight, and Bébert supported him.

It was raining.

"Cully! My pal!" said Bouboule.

"Yes, yes," answered Bébert. "You've had

sixty of the best out of me. You're a card."

"Certainly I'm a . . . card."

"A wonder."

And Bouboule who had himself well in hand, looked straight in front of him and repeated: "A real . . . yes . . . a real, a real . . . an honest to God . . . genuine . . ."

Emile followed behind. He was shocked by fat Bouboule's behavior. No one was looking at him and he wondered if he could not take advantage of it to slip away. . . . He had left his glass of wine half full on the table for fear of getting drunk and now, under the fine penetrating drizzle that was freezing him to the bone, he followed the two men, pitying himself for being in their company.

"And where is Monsieur Emile?" demanded Bouboule as if he had guessed what Emile was thinking.

Bébert helped him to turn round.

"Walk here close to me," said Bouboule. "There! There! Arm in arm."

"I like him, d'you know," he added to Bé-

bert. "He's a pal, such a sociable chap. Aren't you, Monsieur Emile?"

"A good sort . . . an honest boy . . ."

"But where are we going?" enquired Emile gently. "Couldn't we take the passage way under the Métro?"

"What?" said Bouboule.

Emile repeated: "Under the Métro."

And to decide the drunkard, he reasoned: "It isn't raining under the Métro. . . . We'll be under cover."

"Under cover?"

Bouboule stopped short, and leaning on Emile, said in an indistinct and confidential voice:

"Under cover? Well, Monsieur Emile, I'm going to tell you what I think, because I know . . . and I'm proud of it, the house, a wonderful house . . . where as for being under cover . . . one is under cover, Monsieur Emile. . . . You are quite right . . . to the right, march . . . there's No. 162, my children . . . and the little ladies are very obliging."

VIII

EMILE was obliged to follow. Bouboule held him and did not let go. Wearing their wet coats, they entered a large room full of women who were dancing to the sound of an automatic piano, and who at once rushed forward to welcome them. Emile was dumfounded. He guided Bouboule to the end of the room, made him sit down on a bench and collapsed at his side.

The women crowded round, hopping and uttering little cries. They half opened their dressing gowns.

"Two women," said Bébert with simplicity.

"Well then, take me, me . . . me . . ." They all spoke at once displaying their painted smiles, their breasts, their thighs, their bodies

naked and alive. . . . "Which of us do you want? Say . . . Which?"

Bébert pointed out two of the ladies and assigned them seats on the bench near fat Bouboule. They did not need much urging. One of them, who was fair, and was called Denyse, sat astride on Emile's knee and asked without ceremony: "Will you stand drinks?"

"Yes," said Emile.

"Then it'll be a cherry for me," she ordered in a loud voice.

"And you Carmen, what will you have?"

Carmen, who was rubbing herself against Bouboule, and caressing his hands, announced: "A liqueur brandy."

"And cigarettes," added Bouboule joyfully.

The waiter recommended a special liqueur to the gentlemen, gave the order at the cash desk, and came back with his tray.

It was Bouboule's turn to pay. They clinked glasses with familiarity. The girls laughed, fluttered, stole cigarettes which they hid in the colored veils which kept their hair in place, then

as the automatic piano began to play a loud valse they sang, excited by the noise.

Voilà
Maria,
La terreur des Batignolles,
Elle dégringole
Les passants,
Tous les hommes pourtant
En raffolent . . .

"Do you like dancing?" asked Denyse of Emile.

"No I don't dance."

"And what about making love?"

Emile shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, look here," said the girl . . . "It's good all the same, a little lady . . . What do you think? I'll show you . . .

She laid her plump naked leg on his knee—a leg made almost elegant by a white silk sock and a neat patent leather shoe—and pressing herself close to him tried to allure him with her eyes.

"Nobody resists me," she confided. "Every one knows that I'm the prettiest girl in the house and the sauciest."

"No—no," said Emile.

Denyse burst into a shrill laugh and she pressed Emile's legs tighter, giving little jerks to communicate some of her excitement to him and decide him to go upstairs—but Emile resisted. He did not answer the very direct questions which the little lady asked and tried as best he could not to be tempted by her promises.

Bébert, seated opposite, was watching him. "You'll find it difficult to get out of it . . ." he observed. "That kid is very determined."

"What did I tell you," continued Denyse . . . "there, come along, you'll only have seven francs to pay at the cash desk, and then the little present for me. It won't ruin you."

"I've told you no."

"You're wrong."

Emile bashfully disengaged himself. He had had enough of the farce. Was he going to be annoyed against his will? He looked angrily at Denyse.

"Oh, well," said she, "you ought to have told me that you were only a mean brute . . ."

"Leave me alone," grunted Emile.

"There! don't get cross!"

Bébert interrupted:

"Sometimes," he said to Denyse, "one makes a mistake about people."

"Or one meets silly asses."

"So much the better," said Emile, who would have been wiser to hold his tongue.

"So much the better?"

Denyse pouted, she looked at herself in the looking glass, arranged the meshes of fair hair which escaped from under her head dress, and, pointing at Emile, who was speechless, said aloud: "Did you hear, I was talking about silly asses. . . . He understands."

"What's the matter?" enquired Bouboule with courtesy. Denyse left the table. The room was full of a "special evening" crowd—soldiers, workmen, little clerks in bowler hats, young men in caps drank with the girls and followed them occasionally in the direction of a narrow staircase. It was impossible to hear oneself speak.

An orchestra composed of a banjo and a concertina played dance music as soon as the automatic piano stopped. Shimmies, fox trots, blues succeeded the valses and the polkas, and then the concertina with its nasal and sonorous gurgle began a java and, at the first note, all the women stood up. Rattles fastened on to the player's foot accentuated the rhythm. Most of the women danced with each other and took advantage of the dance to display their most secret charms to the drinkers. As they exhibited them they imparted to them a lascivious movement in which they were expert. One saw them in all their nakedness in spite of their red, green, tango, pink, blue or yellow veils which were tied in a knot on the shoulder and fell gracefully down the back, and a negress whom a sailor was pushing backwards showed between her thighs the long, stiff and uncurled hair of her obscure fleece.

Emile could not believe his eyes. He looked, seized by a strong uneasiness, at all the rounded hips, the entangled legs, the breasts of which some were firm and well shaped, the clean-cut

flanks that dazzled him, and a mute intoxication took possession of his senses. However he dared not let it be noticed because of Bébert who was not in the least moved by the sight and turned his back. Wherever he looked, Emile saw women, and he could not avoid them, for they took pleasure in forcing the attention of a man whoever he might be.

Carmen was the only girl not dancing. She busied herself with the conquest of Bouboule, whispered in his ear, and kissed him. Bouboule at the height of satisfaction, was being most complacent, when after the java, Denyse who had seated herself at a table with three young men wearing black surah shirts, gave a little nod of beckoning to Carmen.

"Will you allow me?" asked Carmen with great politeness. She got up, and in a low voice Denyse began to relate an apparently scandalous story. Emile thought at first that they were talking about him, but Carmen leaned towards Denyse and both looked silently at Bébert and his friend. Carmen came back to the table with an ill-natured expression that surprised Emile.

Bouboule also seemed to be struck by it. "What is the matter?" he asked. "Isn't there going to be any more loving?"

"Oh," said Carmen, "find somebody else."

Denyse had left her companions. She was now at the cash desk speaking to the *patron*, who, behind an enormous artificial plant, could see without being seen. A short time afterwards, that individual emerged from his hiding place and approached Bébert.

"*Tiens!* good evening, Monsieur Paul," said Bébert.

Monsieur Paul was a heavy and circumspect man who did not laugh on every day of the week.

"You have not," he declared without any other explanation, "to take root at this table, messieurs. D'you hear me? As for Madame Carmen, she is wanted."

"Very well, Monsieur Paul," said the woman at once.

Bouboule looked round.

"You're not much of a business man," he declared sneering. "How's that? I've come to

spend money in your place and you take away my girl."

"It may be," asserted Monsieur Paul, "but that's my affair. Don't argue. I won't have any crooked business in my place and I won't have any fool talk to the women. The waiter won't serve you again."

Bébert had grown pale.

"Your women," he said, "we sha'n't eat them."

"That's sure," confirmed Bouboule, "and we haven't come here on business, Monsieur Paul."

"That'll do.'

"Well, we won't go," decided Bébert suddenly. He leaned back in his chair and lit a cigarette.

Monsieur Paul seemed to hesitate. He remained standing near Bébert who blew his smoke through his nose insolently, then, without raising his voice: "I'll send the waiter to call the police," he said. "Just as you like . . . or I give you three minutes by my watch—and no arguments."

"Oh," said Bouboule, "to us! Trying to bluff us!"

Bébert said to him: "He wouldn't talk like that outside."

"No, he wouldn't dare."

"Outside is not my business. Here I'm the master, and I like fair play in my place."

And he consulted his watch sedately, whilst informed of what was going on by Denyse and Carmen, all the women of the establishment gazed at them.

"Let's go," then said Emile. "Come, Monsieur Bébert, Monsieur Bouboule!"

"Shut your mouth."

Bouboule grumbled with contempt: "My opinion is that it's enough to disgust anybody to be received like this. . . . All right, Monsieur Paul, we're going."

"And you as well, d'you hear?" ordered Monsieur Paul speaking to Bébert, who was clutching the marble top of the table as if to cling to it . . . "off you go, *ouste!*"

Bébert ended by getting up, but he dived his hand into his pocket.

"Are you mad?" whispered Bouboule seizing his wrist, "Come on! As we've got to go, let's go."

And he pushed Bébert rapidly towards the door where Emile, much upset by this scene, waited in expectation of the most dire calamities.

Bébert's wrath exploded outside and as Emile tried to soothe him, he became the victim of it.

"Idiot! Ass!" snapped Bébert. "Look at him, the deformity! The whole thing is his fault. Couldn't you stay where you were?"

"But the police would have come!"

"The police," said Bébert with hatred. "I'd have shot into them sooner than let them touch me."

"Oh!" said Emile.

Bébert went on: "To start with, the police couldn't have done anything. We were quiet, we weren't troubling anybody."

"I don't know," said Emile ingenuously. "I'm not used to it."

"Shut up!"

"Monsieur Bébert!'

"We have done all we could," observed Bouboule, determined to take everything gaily. "Don't grumble, Bébert. We'd have been in a nice hole if the coppers had come! They always help the *patrons*."

"Ah! you as well," replied Bébert harshly, "you're mixing up with this."

"Don't worry about it, come!"

"Yes, I do worry."

"And then," demanded Bouboule. "You're joking, *voyons* . . . a man like you!"

Bébert pointed at Emile, and with an accent of intense pity and disgust: "I worry," said he, "because he's such a——"

And he spat in Emile's direction letting his arm fall. Emile, disconcerted, reproached himself bitterly, for with a semblance of energy he could perhaps have avoided this evening. But it was too late now. Bébert had begun again to insult him, to treat him without courtesy, to try to pick a quarrel and he dared not exasperate him by answering. Emile did not dream of standing up to the passionate and violent little man. But he felt such a keen disappointment

that his one idea was to go home, and he slackened his pace.

"Get on in front," shouted Bébert.

Emile said sadly: "I'd like to go home."

"No."

"What can it matter to you?"

"Get on, I tell you," repeated Bébert roughly . . . "I don't care if you're tired, you'll come anyhow."

"But where?"

"To Tango's bar," Bouboule informed him. "We're just in time for our ladies. *Allez!* Don't worry, Monsieur Emile. When the ladies are there we won't be long following them to bed."

"Why?" asked Bébert.

"Well. Because it's Saturday," replied Bouboule. "The day when they have most work. Don't you remember?"

"Ah yes, that's true," conceded Bébert.

The rain was still falling and threw a dim, reddish halo round the lights. Long reflections crossed each other in every direction on the glistening pavements and the red lights of a to-

bacco shop added a trail of blood. The shadow that brooded over the street was limitless, motionless and mournful like a thick black cloth with long misty folds.

Emile associated the icy winter night and this lifeless and desolate perspective with his own discouragement and the further he advanced, the more worried, broken and helpless he felt.

"Here we are, here we are," announced Bouboule all at once.

The Métro gallery on the right plunged under the darkness of the pavement between the row of gas lamps, and the electric lit windows of the bars shone dazzlingly at the foot of the houses.

"Here," Bouboule said again. "Come in . . . Ah bravo Monsieur Emile . . . the third table . . . there, sit down and make yourself at home."

"Waiter, three anis."

IX

IRMA arrived the first, just as the cheap clock on the wall was striking half past twelve. She was very tired, but her surprise was great when she saw Emile in such joyous company.

"What made you go out with him?" she asked Bébert who sat without opening his mouth.

"It's not the best piece of work I ever did," replied that gentleman.

"Joking apart?"

"*Hé*, cut it out . . . Bébert's in a bad temper," whispered Bouboule in Irma's ear.

She looked at her brother and said: "You've been making yourself disagreeable again?"

"No," muttered Emile, "not at all. Monsieur Bébert forced me to go out with him."

"Forced?"

"Well, he obliged me," said Emile.

Bébert shook his head.

"That will teach me," he said, "to try to be friendly . . . wait. . . . You won't lose by it."

"And what is he drinking?" asked Irma gently. She was searching for a derivative. "An anis?"

"I haven't drunk any of it yet," said Emile.

"Well, drink!" cried Bébert. "Drink, pig!"

Irma tried to interfere.

"It'll be for me," she murmured, "because he doesn't like it. Pass me your glass, Emile."

"No," said Bébert, "they've served him and he must drink it."

"*Voyons*, Bébert!"

"He'll drink it," said Bébert roughly, "or I'm not a man. . . . *Nom de Dieu!*"

Emile felt faint.

"I'm waiting!" grunted Bébert.

This scene was really stupid.

"Let him do it quietly," proposed Bouboule, "give him time. You know when one is not in the mood sometimes, one can't make up one's mind."

Emile timorously seized his glass and put it to his lips.

"It's not bad," explained Bouboule, to help the unhappy man. "It is good even . . . and agreeable. . . . Isn't it, Madame Irma? Anis is refreshing, and good for the stomach."

"Pouah!" said Emile.

He was very pale and gave Bébert an imploring glance, hoping that the other would soften. But Bébert was inflexible, and Emile was obliged to submit.

"Well," said Irma amiably, "You see? It didn't kill you!"

Emile was silent.

"He won't answer, you may be sure!" growled Bébert. "He'd rather be killed. Ah, the dirt!"

Fortunately at this moment, Mme. Camille, whom Bouboule "managed" and with whom he shared her earnings, appeared and saluted the company. Her muddy clothes and her hat pulled low over her eyes, did not beautify her, but Bouboule, probably on account of the bet he had won in the same establishment, wel-

comed her with a thousand tendernesses.

"Come and put your little self here," said he lovingly.

"Sit near your old hubby."

"Well, I've earned that much," said the distinguished person he spoke to. She kissed Bouboule, took her hat off, arranged her hair and her face, and pleased to find herself in a warm room, stifled a yawn. Mme. Camille was very lady-like indeed. She wore a tight, narrow, mahogany colored mackintosh, and her hair, cut short and very curly, framed an engagingly youthful face. Her clear eyes, narrow and slanting, smiled continually.

"Who is that?" she asked, discreetly pointing out Emile.

"My brother," said Irma.

Camille nodded to him. Emile who saw her through a mist did not answer.

The anis he had drunk made him giddy, and left a sickening taste under his tongue which he could not get rid of. "Do you feel ill?" asked Irma who had been observing him.

Emile was about to complain.

"Don't bother about him," sneered Bébert. "Ill? Because he's drunk a glass?"

"Yes," said Emile.

"Well, my old boy, you'll get over it," declared Bébert. "It's your affair. If you think I'm going to come and hold your hand for you, there's nothing doing."

Irma was not reassured. She saw that Emile felt sick, and was afraid that he would make a scene. She made room for him at her side and whilst Bouboule, Camille and Bébert were conversing, she questioned him in a low voice: "Perhaps you have been drinking too much?" she whispered. "No? One glass wouldn't hurt you all the same. . . . Have you got a pain? Where?"

"Everywhere," explained Emile, his eyes closed. "Everything is turning round. I feel I'd like to throw myself on the floor."

"No . . . no . . . no. . . ."

"To begin with, when we first came here, Bébert stood champagne . . . and Monsieur Bouboule emptied five bottles, all by himself . . . ou-la-la . . . I assure you. I did not even finish my glass . . ."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards we had liqueurs."

"How many?"

"One," said Emile with a hiccup.

Irma began to laugh.

"It's nothing to laugh at," Emile reproached her. "You wouldn't laugh if you knew where we had been."

"What's that?"

"No, no, don't try to guess . . . I don't want to say anything."

Bébert was listening; he turned to Irma and asked: "What's he saying now?"

"Bah! let him alone . . . let him alone."

Emile, wagging his head and suddenly laughing to himself, went on. "Impossible," he declared, as if someone was pressing him to answer . . . "quite impossible . . . don't insist."

"But he's drunk," scoffed Bébert.

"I beg your pardon?"

Bébert called Bouboule to witness the sight.

"It's you who drank," he declared, "and he's the one who is tipsy. *Hein?* What?"

"Yes," admitted Bouboule, "he can't drink."

The two men exchanged an amused glance and, as Emile was still declaring that he would never betray his secret: "You'll see," said Bébert, "the stories he'll bring out. Oh, the poor old boy. If it's not a pity? At his age . . ."

"Well, don't worry about him," said Irma, "don't take any notice of him . . ."

And she added, but in an undertone: "What liqueur did you make him drink?"

Bébert grunted: "But nothing at all," he answered . . . "look—as much as that, a thimbleful of marc. Nothing!"

Emile had opened his eyes and finding himself near Irma he felt better. He fixed astonished eyes on Bouboule, then leaning sideways discovered Bébert, whom he had doubtless forgotten, and scowled.

"Eh, you damn fool," said Bébert. "That's the effect I have on you, is it?"

The other drew quickly back behind Irma.

"He's too funny," Bouboule was obliged to confess. "He wants to play now. He is trying to play hide and seek . . . there . . . hi! hi! hi! . . . Does he want something?"

"He wants to go home," answered Irma weakly. "Don't you Emile? That's what it is, isn't it?"

"Yes, go home, sleep," said Emile with a gloomy expression.

Bébert did not seem to hear. He offered a round of claret and proposed sandwiches, but the ladies were not hungry. Their eyes on the clock, they were waiting for closing time to decide their men to go away, they were both utterly worn out.

Emile sighed deeply.

"Patience," advised Irma tenderly, taking his hand under the table. "We'll soon be going."

"No, now," wailed Emile.

Irma shook him. "There," she reproached, "make an effort to be reasonable, at least. You're never contented. We've got enough of it as well, and we don't complain. Go on . . . try to behave like other people."

Bébert triumphed.

"I'm sick of telling you," he proclaimed in a bad tempered voice, "that he's a poison, that fellow. He would discourage father and mother.

Look at his face! Could you find anybody more exacting?"

Emile sat upright.

He said: "I'm not talking to you."

"But I'm talking to you," said Bébert at once, "and I don't give a damn if it pleases you or not."

"Yes," replied Emile, "only you weren't so uppish when we were in the other place."

"What?"

"At the brothel," he precised spitefully. "Monsieur Bouboule won't contradict me. Ah! isn't it true?"

Irma tried to stop him.

"No," Emile went on. "Now that I've begun, I'll say all I've got to say. It's too easy to torment people who don't defend themselves. Was it I who proposed going to the brothel? I followed you there against my will. . . . And there with the women . . ."

"So you've been to see your old friends?" said Irma to Bébert.

He pushed her aside brutally, with one gesture, and Emile fell back.

"Go on," said Bébert . . . "go on . . . go on. Talk. Tell us all you've got in your dirty head. Spit it out."

Bouboule got up.

"Well?"

"I don't know any more," muttered Emile feverishly. "I didn't want, I couldn't help saying it—it . . . don't hurt me, Monsieur Bébert . . ." He too stood up, and Bébert followed his example.

"At the brothel!" he yelled. . . . "Well, say it again, explain a little the way I behaved at the brothel. Spy! Explain."

He approached Emile and taking him by the lapels of his overcoat, began to shake him.

"Talk! Ah! You don't want to—good for nothing. Well, you dirty beast, I'll show you what blabbing costs. . . . There. . . . Carrion. . . . Rottenness! Dirt!"

In his hands, Emile danced in a burlesque way, and Bébert hit him ferociously in the ribs. He did not defend himself. He moaned. He was looking for his hat, which must have rolled on the floor, and Bébert struck without stopping,

bawling insults.

The last customers of the bar followed the scene with approval without trying to interfere.

At last Bébert bent down, picked up Emile's hat, jammed it on to his head and with his free hand struck the unfortunate man a sounding slap in the face which he accompanied with a violent kick behind. Then half opening the door: "Get off now," he cried. . . . "Run . . . and quicker than that . . . there outside!"

Bouboule, close to Irma, prevented her from seeing clearly what was happening.

He said, however, when Emile had gone: "You see, Madame Irma, Bébert is perhaps a little hot tempered, but Monsieur Emile was in the wrong in this affair. Between you and me, what harm was there in going to the brothel? It was raining. We were tired of waiting for you. And then? Do you think that one would amuse oneself deceiving a lady of your class? It wouldn't be common sense."

And he concluded, with formal ceremony, his Cronstadt hat in his hand: "We others, Madame, we have *savoir-vivre.*"

X

EMILE stayed in bed the next day and tried not to attract attention. He was sore from the blows he had received, he suffered great pain when he tried to move, and his limbs were so weary that he feared he would not be able to go to his office next morning. The prospect filled him with uneasiness. Moreover he reproached himself for having needlessly hurt La Rouque by telling her where Bébert and Monsieur Bouboule had taken him the night before. It was absurd. It was a petty revenge. Emile could not forgive himself, for he was no longer angry with his sister. He had to admit that she had always defended him against Bébert, and this thought, at once sweet and painful, harassed him

ceaselessly. Was it fair that Irma, who had so often protected him, should be unhappy through his fault? He knew that she must be unhappy—for complete silence reigned on the other side of the partition.

"There," he thought sadly, "now they will quarrel, she won't trust me any more."

Then, in his unhappiness, he thought of Bébert, and felt a fierce satisfaction because he had told him the truth. In his narrow, limited brain, always distorted by fear, he was very near to seeing himself as a hero, and magnifying enormously and vainglorioously the fact of having spoken. For Emile was one of those stubborn and obstinate people who never learn from their experiences. He always tried to justify himself. His hate for Bébert blinded him, and he would have provoked the most cruel outrages in order to prove to himself that he was not without courage. It was the first time he had ever shown any, and he imagined that things would now improve and felt less miserable.

But Emile was reckoning without Bébert, who woke up about dusk and said after yawning

loudly: "He'd better keep out of my way from now on, that idiot."

He spoke at the top of his voice, evidently so as to be heard by Emile, and after a remark made by Irma, went on in the same tone to say that he understood the plan. "He wants to make us quarrel. He wants you to get sick of me. Ah, the lousy beggar!"

There was a silence. Emile held his breath. But Bébert, having spoken his mind, was quiet for more than an hour and from time to time Emile could faintly hear the bed creaking when he changed his position. Then Bébert got up. There was the sound of bare feet on a wooden floor, he put his shoes on, rapped out an oath or two, went into the kitchen, came back, spoke to Irma, went to and fro for some minutes, and finally went out, slamming the door with violence. Huddled in his bedclothes Emile at first felt a certain happiness when he thought that Bébert was no longer in the house. But the next minute the pain he was suffering made him cry out, and Irma in her room began to grumble.

He asked what was the matter.

"Don't make such a fuss," answered Irma.

"But it's the pain."

She told him: "Well, all the better. I wish he had broken your legs."

"My legs?"

"Yes."

"Oh, *par exemple,*" said Emile, "*par exemple!* You're not fair, Irma.

"Why do you say that? Look here. It wasn't my fault. Think. You can't be so unfair. *Hein?*"

"Will you shut up?" cried Irma.

This snub was so unexpected that Emile was very near to tears. "Irma too," he lamented inwardly. "She is against me now. Ah! what a dirty world. She . . . Irma!"

Everybody was abandoning him then. He was deserted! The wretched man felt bewildered, lost in the sad half light that filled his room, exposed from henceforth to the frenzy of Bébert, and the idea was so terrible that he felt he must be dreaming.

"Irma," he called in his falsetto voice . . . "Irma, oh no . . . it's not true. . . . You're not vexed with me?"

But Irma was silent, and Emile had to resign himself. A little later, he heard the girl moving about in her room, pouring out water, putting on her boots, and while she dressed she hummed a tune. He quivered. She was preparing to join Bébert at the Tango bar. The idea that she was going without giving him a look was particularly painful to Emile. However, hearing her move so close to him, he did not lose all hope. He thought that she would probably come in to see him before she left and he closed his eyes for this thought was sweet and lulled him.

"Yes, yes," he murmured . . . "she will come." He was like a child, longing for caresses because it is sick and must stay in bed. Even the humming which came from the next room soothed him. The presence of a woman softened him and gradually, unconsciously, he began to follow in thought Irma's slightest movements, to follow and anticipate them. He saw her at her toilet, she was bending down, washing, drying herself, then she was lacing her boots. Emile welcomed these images with a feeling that he dared not analyze, and imperceptibly other

presences, stranger and more secret, substituted themselves in his mind for Irma's. He gave himself up to them, allowed them to move freely in the room and around his bed. How could he avoid them? A slight attack of fever accelerated the rhythm of their comings and goings. But what presences? Who were these women? Emile could not have answered. That they were there was sufficient. He felt comforted, and as it were benumbed. However when he thought of Irma, he no longer saw her with precision, or her face had changed, she had strange mannerisms and little irritating provoking fits of laughter.

"*Hein?* What?" he stuttered. "What then?"

He was confusedly restless, talked meaninglessly, felt hot and cold. What was this? It was Denyse who was in the room talking to him. What was she saying? Emile did not hear, he understood nothing. Suddenly he guessed that she was undressing and approaching the bed. What then? It was she who had poured out water a moment ago to wash herself. She and not Irma? Was it possible that he had made

such a mistake? Denyse. He felt an extraordinary happiness. It was she, with her plump naked legs, her painted lips, her breasts, her cold laughing eyes. He touched her, passed his man's hands over her body. And she did not defend herself. She murmured in a low voice words that flattered his desire, troubled him, set him on fire.

Emile woke up.

"Irma!" he cried, "where are you?"

He pushed the bedclothes aside, tried to raise himself up in bed, slipped, made another effort, managed to stand up with his bare feet on the plank floor.

He felt his way towards the door.

"Are you there?" he asked.

But there was no answer, and the poor man groaning at every step, ended by discovering his clothes on the floor. He picked them up, felt for his watch and looked at it by the light of a match. Nine o'clock. He understood that Irma had gone out a long time ago and without looking for her any longer, he went sadly back to bed.

XI

AFTER this Emile often thought about Denyse, and when he came out of the Métro at Grenelle, was tempted to go and see her. But he feared that she would snub him, or that Monsieur Paul, the proprietor, would recognize him and turn him out of the place.

The memory of the girl had penetrated him and tormented him incessantly. In vain he opposed to it the disdain he had always felt for women of that sort, he thought of her all the same and was ashamed of himself.

It was especially in the evening when he came out of his office that desire would possess him. Instead of walking up the Rue du Commerce, Emile went along the boulevard. When he was

opposite No. 162 he stopped and looked, trying to remain unnoticed, at its stained glass windows. He observed the comings and goings of the passers by, then reluctantly went away. He lived with his longing for the girl, a longing so strong that it tyrannized him and threw him into a state of semi-idiocy.

Emile was a completely changed man during this period. He would stare at the women in the streets, turn round as they passed, shake his head, and at nights, when Irma came home with a man, he strained his ears to listen.

He forgot what she was to him, tried to surprise her sighs, her whispered words, took a bitter delight in them. He imagined her giving herself for money—just like Denyse—and suffered, but his suffering was full of obscure delights. His passions asleep for so long, left him no peace, and drove him to follow the little girls of the Quarter whom he terrified or old women who might perhaps listen to him. But he dared not speak to any of them. At the last moment his courage would fail, and he would go away, tormented by desire, realizing at last

that all these creatures were odious to him and could not replace Denyse. What a fool he was! There was only one Denyse in the world, he knew it, only one, but he knew also that he would never visit her because she would jeer at him.

* * *

However, one evening, the wish to see this woman became so imperious that after having wandered for a long while in the neighborhood of No. 162, he made up his mind to go in.

In the empty room, the women were sitting in little groups, playing cards, sewing, embroidering. Two of them were knitting, they sat opposite to each other near the radiator, and their legs were crossed under the dressing gowns which were tightly shut because they felt cold.

The *patron,* to Emile's relief, was not there. Behind the green plants sat an enormous woman who at once rang for the waiter.

"*Ah tiens!* it's you!" said Denyse. "Are you by yourself?"

"Yes—quite by myself," replied Emile, "absolutely. What will you have?"

"A little cherry," said she, "so as to change."

"At this time?"

"I, you know, time doesn't matter to me," said Denyse.

She sat near him on the bench.

"Well?" she questioned.

Emile seemed to be dreaming. He looked at Denyse, smiled, took her hand.

"It's funny," he began. "It's so much better when there is no music."

"You think so?"

"Don't you?" he corrected himself, fearing that he had offended her. "It's better and it's not so good. . . . It's different."

"Naturally," observed Denyse, "one can't live the life of Saturday every day, no one would like that. . . ."

The waiter, bearer of the cherry brandy, advanced.

"And Monsieur," he enquired, "what will Monsieur take?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Well pay," said Denyse, "and give me the

money for the room. Then we can go upstairs at once."

She emptied her glass of liqueur at one draught, helped Emile to get up, then preceding him towards the staircase which led to the first floor: "Madame!" she called giving the money.

The room was small and airless, with an iron bed against the wall and a basin laid upon a slop-pail. But Emile thought it pretty. Thrust into the frame of the looking-glass were photographs of soldiers, postcards representing doves holding in their beaks a letter on which one read the words: "Tender message." Emile stopped to look at the postcards. There were views of Grenoble at Montargis. He declared: "I know Montargis."

Then he approached Denyse shyly and took her in his arms.

"Wait," she said, pushing him aside, "take off your coat. It's wet and it makes me cold. . . . You don't mind?"

"Certainly," said Emile.

"But," Denyse went on with a mischievous

pout, "you're going to give me my little present, aren't you? quite nicely . . ."

She helped herself out of Emile's purse to two ten franc notes and one of five, slipped them into her stockings, then as he was devouring her with his eyes: "Don't look like that," she jeered, "and come on. . . . What? Aren't you ready yet."

* * *

That moment spent with Denyse left him with so painful an impression that he went away staggering, his head empty, his heart heavy, full of self reproach. He walked blindly seeking the shadow, and without any clear notion of where he was going. In the streets were passers by, taxis, heavy delivery carts clattering past empty, and hundreds of lights which lit up the houses.

Emile saw nothing, heard nothing. He felt disgusted, he tried to fly from himself, and when, after having wandered about the streets for nearly three hours he found himself in front of the house where he lived, he seemed stupefied.

On the threshold, Belle-Amour and the ladies

called Nénette, la Marquise and Trou de Vrille (Gimlet-hole) stood jabbering. They drew aside to let him pass and Emile heard la Marquise laugh. He did not answer and went upstairs.

"Is that you?" called Irma.

Emile said nothing and went into his room. Yes, it was he. Couldn't she see that? What could it matter to her? It was no one's business. But Irma insisted. She rapped at Emile's door.

"Well," said Emile. "I didn't call you. . . . Has anything happened?"

"No," replied Irma from behind the door. "But I'm not used to your coming home so late. I was anxious."

"I'll come home when I like," he grunted.

"Well, all right."

She asked him, as she was going out: "At any rate nothing has happened to you?"

Emile was silent.

"Well," said Irma going. "That's all right. I thought that Bébert had met you and that it was he who had kept you out. Go to bed and sleep now."

* * *

"Sleep," grumbled Emile, seated fully dressed on his bed. "Sleep. If I want to. She's not going to order me about now? That would crown everything. . . . *Ou-la-la!* But Bébert? What does she mean? Keep me out?"

"Ah yes," he decided finally. . . . "There! . . . Bébert must have been hanging about to bother me again. He was looking out for me."

This idea amused him at first, because he had escaped Bébert, then saddened him. He felt himself alone in the world, piteous, defenseless before this man who wished him evil and would not be pacified. Not a man but a brute, a blackguard.

What pleasure did he find in pursuing Emile continually with his hatred? Emile knew that he was not strong enough to struggle and understood that it was precisely because of this that Bébert persisted. Had Emile been able to defend himself, Bébert would have let him alone. This was certain. He would have behaved cautiously as he had done with Monsieur Paul the

other night, even if he had made a scene when it was all over.

"Naturally," thought Emile. "With Monsieur Paul he kept himself quiet, whereas with me . . ."

He suddenly remembered Denyse, the empty room at No. 162, the women sewing and playing cards. One of them who had been sitting at a little table using a small metal apparatus to make cigarettes appeared before him very distinctly, and he remembered having looked at her whilst Denyse was talking. He felt still more lonely and wretched. He searched for a comforting thought and found none. His sister had openly supported Bébert ever since the scene at the Tango bar. As for Denyse. Emile hesitated. She had behaved as if he were some ordinary client, without eagerness, without pleasure. What had he imagined? He loathed admitting his own artlessness which humiliated and irritated him.

"Yes," he groaned, "it serves me right. . . . So much the worse for me."

But his thoughts came back to Denyse and

he gloated over their meeting in spite of the painful remembrance he had of it. She was the only human being he had to think about and he connected everything with her. However much the woman had disappointed him, she was his consolation. He had nothing to oppose to his memory of her. It was heart rending and ridiculous. He felt it, he tried to convince himself of it, perhaps so that he should not suffer. Still even in his self-disgust, he could find no one nearer to him, no one to be compared to her. . . .

What was Denyse doing at that moment? Emile knew only too well. He pictured her going from one man to the other, offering herself, sitting down and drinking. He was not jealous of all the men who went up to her room with her, he found it natural. He was not offended by it. Not in the least. Why offended? Emile found no reason for being offended, but when he was in bed he took his head in his hands and alone with himself at last he said in a low voice:

"Dirt! Whore . . . oh yes . . . go on . . .

you bitch! Dirty bitch! Dirty whore . . ."
And he began to sob.

XII

HE was awakened towards three o'clock in the morning by a knocking on the wall and a voice saying: "I want him to wake up, *nom de Dieu!* and he'll wake up, I want to talk to him."

Emile rubbed his eyes.

"Will you wake up?" continued the voice . . . "Ah pig! He's pretending to be asleep. . . . Wait a bit, my son! Emile!"

"Well!" said Emile.

He realized that it was Bébert and asked: "What's the matter?"

Bébert shouted louder: "I'm sick of you, d'you understand?" And he struck the wall with his fist, repeating "sick" in so venomous a fash-

ion that Emile frightened was silent.

Bébert then burst into loud laughter. "Listen," he proposed, and began to sing:

"Joyeux! fais ton fourbi
Pas vu. Pas pris.
Mais pris, rousti,
Bat d'Af'.
Ça sent la merd' dans les roses."

"He must be drunk," thought Emile.

Bébert continued: "You were right to keep out of the way this evening, because if I'd seen you I would have settled you. Ugly face! Ah there. But we'll meet some other day and then I'll kill you. I warn you. I'll do you in."

"Why?" said Emile, overwhelmed.

"Ah, he asks why," exclaimed Bébert sneering. "For no reason, dirt. Because I want to."

He continued his song, knocked again on the wall and suddenly feeling very happy announced: "I'll kill you with my knife, Môsieur! Take that! *Pan!* And the red stuff will run—I'll have . . ."

As an accompaniment to his words, Bébert had pulled his knife out of his pocket, opened it and thrown it furiously against the partition. The plaster crumbled. Then bending down he picked up the knife, which had fallen on the floor, and began his astonishing demonstration all over again.

"Come to bed now," said Irma.

"Oh that's enough," replied Bébert harshly. "I'm not a man to be ordered about."

"But I'm not ordering you about.'

"You'd better not."

After a short interval La Rouque went on: "You needn't wake everybody up. If you think it's agreeable for the neighbors. . . . Tomorrow the *concierge* will come and jaw."

"I don't care a——," said Bébert.

"Oh, you don't care! You don't care!"

"Not a—— And then?" he grunted. "Do you want to have a row?"

Stupefied Emile glued his ear to the wall. The voices of Irma and Bébert reached him more distinctly. They resounded oddly.

"Ah, you want to have a row," shouted Bébert.

"Keep quiet."

"No."

"There, Bébert," said the Red One quietly. "What you are doing is senseless. You've spoilt the wall-paper, with your knife. Be reasonable."

"I won't——"

"But why. . . . What's the matter?"

He began to whistle.

"Go on, tell me," insisted Irma gently, "you don't want to? Tell me once and for all, and stop . . ."

"There!" answered Bébert, "there's what's the matter."

The slap he gave Irma resounded distinctly, then other duller noises which were certainly blows.

"Oh! stop . . . stop . . . that's enough!" begged La Rouque. "To beat me . . . after all I've been to him . . . you've no heart, Bébert."

"You," he declared, "you get on my nerves."

"You must be mad."

There was a silence, then Bébert's voice again: "I forbid you to cry," he said coldly, "don't cry, d'you understand. Or I'll begin all over again."

"Oh no . . . don't treat me like this, Bébert," moaned the girl. "Don't be unkind to me. . . . After all, what have I done? I've never gone against you in anything? Yet you're always . . ."

"Shut your mouth!"

Emile was most upset. It was a long time since he had heard Irma cry, and in spite of himself he was filled with pleasure and excitement. The more she cried, the louder Bébert shouted at her to keep quiet. Was it possible? Emile did not analyze the pleasure he felt, but he told himself that now he was not the only one to be ill treated by Bébert. La Rouque suffered as well. She was learning in her turn that this was an abject individual, hard-hearted, insensible. At last she would see through him. Emile was beside himself with joy, overwhelmed with an extraordinary happiness. He felt intoxicated.

He trembled. It seemed to him that his heart was beating and throbbing in his throat, stifling him. It was too much all at once, it was too much, and he was on the point of calling out to Irma to be brave and not to yield, when he recovered his self-possession and again became—most fortunately—quieter and more cautious.

"Why should I say anything tonight," he thought, "I'll speak to her tomorrow . . . I'll tell her what I think . . . yes . . . tomorrow."

He did not doubt for one moment that Irma would listen to him and agree to all his proposals. He felt certain of it. She would not forget so soon the blows Bébert had given her. And Emile would act in such a way as to increase her humiliation, and so bind her closer to him. He had always been sure that something like this would happen one day, and now it had come. The day that would change everything. He already saw himself freed from Bébert, and restored to the peaceful life he loved. And not too soon.

Emile strained his ears behind the wall and he

now heard indistinct words, a faint whispering of which he did not grasp the meaning. He waited a few minutes more, then went back to bed and slept very late, an agitated sleep. Next day he woke feeling, contrary to his custom, very well and hearty. Everyone was astonished at his good temper. What was the matter with him? Why did he seem so happy? He left his office in the evening without loitering, came out of the Métro, and mounted the steps to his lodgings four at a time.

"Irma," he called out at once, "Irma! It's me. . . . Here I am."

"Well," said Irma. "What's the matter with you? Aren't you well?"

Emile stopped short and stared at La Rouque who was lacing up her boots. She turned her painted face and carefully shadowed black eyes to him. At that moment she was beautiful. Her red hair thrown back from her face, her bare shoulders, her breast that was visible under the lace of a pink, finely plaited chemise troubled him. He made a gesture.

"What are you shouting about?" said Irma.

"I . . . I thought . . ." answered Emile.

"What?"

"After what happened last night . . . between you . . ."

The Red One frowned severly. "Last night?" she asked.

"But yes."

"What happened?"

"He beat you, didn't he?" said Emile.

She shrugged her shoulders imperceptibly, observed Emile, smiled.

"Certainly," she admitted at once, "he beat me. What about it?"

Emile coughed and lost countenance.

"But how do you know," asked La Rouque, "that he beat me? You were listening?"

"Well," replied Emile, "as Bébert had woke me up."

"Leave Bébert alone," ordered Irma in a disagreeable voice. "Don't mix him up with your affairs, I won't stand it. Besides, even if he woke you up, you had no right to listen. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? If I were to tell him, I

don't know what he'd say, you know. Things go quickly with him."

"All the same, he had no reason to beat you," argued Emile timorously, "I heard everything. No. Not the slightest reason."

"But yes," asserted the Red One.

She tied her boot laces, pushed them inside the varnished leg of the boots, got up.

"And his reasons aren't your business," said she seriously. "They are my own reasons—mine."

Emile shook his head piteously.

"Yes," went on the strange creature. "You are not going to try to rule everything here."

"Oh really!" said Emile, "it isn't me who rules everything here, Irma. You are not just . . ."

"What?"

"I, I thought about the sorrow you had last night, when you were crying, and that's why I came home so quickly. I wanted to be with you, near you."

"No," said La Rouque, "Oh no . . . not that."

"Listen," went on Emile, who saw that in spite of her denials she was more touched than she cared to show, "we are brother and sister, and the wrong that's done to one is done to the other. Isn't it true? The other suffers, at least. I assure you I was sorry for you last night. I suffered, I put myself in your place."

Irma lowered her eyes and asked: "Why did you suffer?"

"Because he's a bad man," he declared, speaking very quickly, "he tries to bully other people all the time. He likes it, it's his vice. Oh, I know him. Last night, again he threatened to kill me, d'you remember? He didn't mind shouting it at the top of his voice."

"He was drunk," replied Irma simply.

"Drunk certainly, but that doesn't make any difference. He'll do what he said he would."

"No!"

"Yes!" replied he. "One can expect anything from a man like that. It pleases him to hurt people. It excites him. I don't know what to do about it. It's useless—my not answering . . ."

Irma said gently: "Sometimes he is so nice."

"Sometimes he hides his real character," affirmed Emile feverishly. "Believe me. . . . And then with you, he has some good times. Because you give him pleasure . . ."

"And money," said Irma.

Emile went on: "Then he gets better, doesn't he? He gives way. . . . Whilst I, I feel that he detests me, hates me, and that one day or another he will ill treat me again in his cowardly way. Ah my God, all alone, I am all alone."

"And I," whispered La Rouque very low, "you forget me. I do all I can to hold him back, be sure . . . and I always will."

"Irma!"

"No, don't make me tell you all that he says when we come home together from the Tango."

"Ah you see, you see," said Emile. . . . "I am right. He has threatened to kill me."

"Sometimes, yes, he talks about it," La Rouque was obliged to admit, "and I pretend to laugh to stop him from thinking of it seriously. If you knew how he treats me then. He knocks me about out of doors without minding people

. . . anywhere we happen to be. And I don't defend myself. I let him get it over."

"But it's abominable."

"It's not always nice being married to him," asserted La Rouque, "a man like that is not easy to understand. He has his own ideas about things."

Emile took Irma in his arms.

"If you would," he said with dread, "Irma."

"What do you mean?"

"Irma, I assure you, if only you would, we'd go away."

"And where would we go?" she asked.

"We'd move to another quarter," answered Emile. "The quarter where I work, it's all right there."

"Rue d'la Roquette?"

"And the other streets too," he explained. "It's full of hotels. We'd live in a hotel and it would be very convenient for you. There are always lots of people about . . ."

"And Bébert would find me again at once," muttered the girl slowly. "He hasn't hidden it from me, you may be sure. Wherever we went

he would find us out. We wouldn't get away. . . ."

"Don't talk like that, Irma!" begged Emile. "Don't take all hope away from me . . . I'm sure that we'd succeed if we tried. . . . No? Won't you try? Are you afraid?"

"No, I'm not afraid."

"Well?"

"Well," she sighed, "I don't know."

Emile was about to press her to run the risk, but he suddenly let his sister go, drew away from her, became livid, and putting a finger on his mouth, made her a sign to be silent.

"Here he is, isn't he?" whispered Irma. "It's he. It's he—Bébert? Some one has opened the door?"

XIII

IT was, in fact, Bébert. He came in, seemed astonished to find Emile with his sister, but said nothing and took off his cap which he threw on the bed.

"Ah!" stammered La Rouque, "Emile and I were just talking about you."

"Well, don't disturb yourselves."

La Rouque told him with a little laugh which sounded false: "We weren't saying anything much."

Bébert turned towards Emile and looking at him: "Here's somebody who's not too pleased to see me," he declared. "Isn't it true?"

"Not at all," replied La Rouque. "Only you frighten him and he takes all your non-

sense seriously. He's at that stage that he doesn't know what to invent to frighten himself. Imagine."

"I, I frighten him?"

"Oh you're funny all the same," said La Rouque, "you can't help it . . . the proof . . ."

"But I've never frightened him," replied Bébert shamelessly. "It's his fancy. Imagination. Have you noticed it, you?"

He made a little grimace, stared in front of him, as if he were suddenly overcome by an obscure thought, smiled, winked one eye.

"I assure you," he asserted in a playful tone of voice, "that there must be a mistake."

And addressing himself to Emile who remained cautiously at a distance. "Well," he said, "answer, as we're talking about you. Aren't you happier? Don't you trust me?"

Emile opened his mouth, but no sound could come out of it. Embarrassed he tried to answer by a gesture, a large uncertain gesture.

"There," remarked Irma, "you put him in a state just by looking at him. He can't talk.

It's funny to be like that, isn't it? You mustn't be angry with him."

"Well naturally," said Bébert.

His expression changed, however, became strained and hard.

"Emile," called La Rouque.

"No, leave him alone," cut in Bébert, "look at him! A little more and he would walk inside the wall, he's so glad I'm talking to him. What did I tell you? He's going to upset the dressing table now."

"Come on," called Irma a second time. "He won't touch you. Come on. Come, Emile."

Bébert, who had slyly thrust his hands into his little waistcoat pocket, waited, rocking himself backwards and forwards.

"Come close—but come here," repeated La Rouque.

"She's right. Come on!" proposed Bébert. "Didn't you hear?"

"I . . . I . . ." stuttered Emile piteously, pointing at Bébert. "There . . . there . . ." He stepped back terrified.

"What?"

Bébert asked: "Are you going to keep us waiting for long? Making such a fuss. Come on then, obstinate. Ah no . . . you won't?"

He made two or three steps in Emile's direction and seemed good naturedly amused with the terror he was inspiring. He took his time, stood in an astonished attitude.

"The knife," muttered Emile, "in his pocket . . . the . . . the knife . . . Irma! He's opened it."

Irma shut her eyes.

"Open?" declared Bébert in a conciliatory way. "Well yes. It's open."

"Oh," begged Emile . . . "for pity's sake! Don't come near me . . . stop!"

"You're all the same an obstinate devil," said Bébert. "If I ask you to come to me, you won't, and when I come to you you shout."

Irma said in a low voice: "Bébert, I won't allow you to hurt him."

"So," he sneered . . . "you . . . you've got something to say about it. You're joking."

"Bébert!"

"Wait!" he answered . . . "there will be

something left for you if you want it. Don't worry."

As he was speaking to Irma, he moved closer to Emile, who tried to thrust him aside. Bébert pushed roughly.

"There!" he declared all of a sudden showing his knife . . . "You'll see. What is a paltry little stroke of the blade? I don't want to kill, you idiot! I'm simply going to prick you . . . prick you . . . you won't feel it . . . I assure you that you'll feel nothing at all . . . hardly."

"Oh no . . . no, no," moaned Emile who had backed to the other end of the room and was standing against the wall motionless, in a terrified attitude.

Bébert stared rudely into his eyes trying to penetrate him with his look, then shaking his weapon with the most engaging expression in the world: "Are you ready?" he questioned. "It'll be done quickly. Don't move."

Emile cried out.

"There!" said Bébert.

He darted his knife forward, withdrew it, to threaten Irma, for she had instinctively moved

forward to stop him. Then very quickly he touched Emile a second time.

"Help," cried Emile, "Murder! Help! Help!"

Bébert declared: "If you make that row I'll finish you . . . *hein*? Do you understand . . . I'll . . ."

He looked at the blade of his knife which was covered with blood and master of himself as of each of the blows he was giving, clenched his teeth.

"Monsieur Bébert, Monsieur Bébert," wept Emile. "No, Monsieur Bébert . . . Oh!"

He collapsed on the floor, screamed louder, quivered with pain. Bébert bent over his victim. He did not sink the blade deeply, but as soon as it touched Emile withdrew it rapidly to stab again. . . . The louder Emile shouted the more coolly Bébert continued his horrible game. He stood up at last, pale, contracted, his eyes gleaming strangely, shut his knife and in a voice which sounded toneless, ordered: "Now there . . . it's over . . . I'm not touching you. . . . But no. . . . No, stand up. . . . Go! The prick-

ings I've given you are less than nothing. . . . Stand up . . . go . . . don't make me say it again. . . . Go off. . . . Go to your room."

Emile, staggering like a drunken man, obeyed, he passed in front of Irma and wanted to stop. Bébert pushed him from the back. He fell down in the passage, got up painfully, disappeared. But Bébert had followed him.

"Go away," moaned Emile.

"You'll undress," said Bébert, "and Irma will give you water, towels, and some thick salt that you'll melt in the water. You'll only have to pass the salt water where you're pricked. . . . You'll go to bed . . ."

"Irma," he called.

She appeared, livid.

"Bring what I've just said," said Bébert quietly, "and make haste. He won't die of it this time. Don't worry. But in case he starts shouting again when you go down, you'd better go by yourself and I'll stay here to look after him."

After this advice, Bébert went off to wash his

hands. He also washed his knife, took off his shoes and put on Emile's slippers.

"He's bleeding a lot, you know," confided Irma joining him in the kitchen.

"Ah, yes?"

"Yes, yes, awfully . . ."

"Well, it's natural," concluded Bébert. "There's nothing in that not quite natural, I assure you. It's rather the contrary that would astonish me."

XIV

TERRIFIED at the sight of his streaming blood, Emile began to weep aloud, but Bébert called him brutally to order.

"Do you want me to come and shut your mouth for you?"

Emile wept more quietly. He had four wounds, not very deep, in the shoulder and the fleshy part of his arm, two others on the right thigh and a long scratch on the groin which bled profusely. The towels he had dipped in the water were crimson. Emile wet them, wrung them out, and pressed them on his wounds, which burned him all the more, and the pain forced little screams out of him which he stifled so as not to irritate Bébert.

That individual sat in the kitchen looking at the newspapers. He was without remorse. He read quietly, a cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth; from time to time he smiled, satisfied with himself, stretched, poured himself out some rum. His watch and his knife were on the table near the bottle. He glanced at them occasionally. The watch reminded him of Irma, the knife of Emile. But he did not think for long about it, and went on reading very seriously.

Five or six times La Rouque came in accompanied, and Bébert heard her open and shut the door. She went downstairs. She came up again. . . . The evening passed without incident. There was silence in Emile's room, he had ended by going to bed and sleeping. As for Bébert, he finished his newspapers, emptied three quarters of the bottle of rum.

He yawned: "Ahhhh . . ."

Irma accompanied a client to the door, and prepared to follow him outside.

"Bah! That's enough," said Bébert to her, "leave it alone for tonight."

He got up, left the kitchen.

"Well," whispered La Rouque... "Emile?"

"He hasn't bothered me," said Bébert, "he's had enough probably."

"Have you been to see him?"

"Well, no."

Irma suggested: "Shall I go and have a look myself? Perhaps he wants clean towels; one can't refuse that."

"I am not stopping you," said Bébert.

He watched Irma going into the room, shook his head silently, went to the door, turned the key in the lock twice, came back.

"Well," he enquired, "he's not dead?"

Irma laden with the basin and the blood-stained towels answered in an undertone: "He's made a mess on the floor, I tell you. It's flooded with water. What an annoying thing!"

"I should think so," said Bébert, going to bed.

La Rouque shook herself.

"Good-night," said Bébert.

"I'm coming," she answered, rinsing the basin at the sink and holding it carefully so as not to soil her clothes. "In five minutes."

She took clean linen out of a cupboard, went back to Emile's bedside and listened to his breathing.

"But he has no sheets," she declared suddenly with astonishment. "What has he done with them? It's annoying all the same! He'll stain everything."

Blood had stuck in clots to his shirt in places; the bed clothes, the mattress; his clothes which he had thrown in a heap on the floor when he undressed, were soaked with it.

"My God," sighed La Rouque, discouraged, "what does a thing like this mean?"

She felt disgusted and saddened, and told herself that to behave in such an odious way, Bébert must indeed find pleasure in cruelties. Was it possible? She asked herself in vain. The thing went beyond her imagination, seemed to her revolting and monstrous. Why? she repeated, walking up and down the room. Why? . . . Why? . . .

Bébert who had gone to bed, called her.

"All right," she said, "I'm coming."

"But at once," cried Bébert.

La Rouque joined him.

"Naturally," he observed, "I don't count for anything now, everything is for the other one."

"He hasn't even got any sheets," said Irma.

"Well, so much the worse."

Bébert sat up in bed.

"You must be crazy," he said, "to worry about sheets."

"That depends," she said, "a poor fellow like that. I can well be worried. After all, he is my brother, isn't he? And you've arranged him properly!"

"He's been asking for it a long time," affirmed Bébert tranquil. "And it had to come."

"Ah—really?"

"Really."

He added, lighting a cigarette: "When people go against me, I revenge myself. I don't forget. I never forget. But as your dirty brother is going to be as quiet as a lamb now, I'll put the sheets back in his room tomorrow morning and we won't say anything more about it."

Then Irma rebelled: "What," she exclaimed, "you! you lowered yourself to do such a thing?"

"Well, why not?"

"Because," said Irma angry, "you're not much of a man to behave so meanly."

Bébert was silent.

"No, not much of a man," the girl continued. "I don't recognize you, it has no name what you did. And what would people say if they knew? Did you think of that?

"Certainly," she went on, "everybody would blame you."

"And you the first, isn't that so?" said Bébert, who had jumped out of bed and stood waiting, his hand raised.

"Yes," said Irma.

The hand came down. Irma did not flinch and received it full in the face.

"Go on," she provoked him, "hit me again, go on. If you think it will make me change my mind, you are wrong. Well, what's the matter? Don't you feel brave enough to do it?"

She looked Bébert full in the face very close, and the better to defy him, began to laugh.

"Look out," said Bébert.

Irma answered him: "To hurt defenseless

people and to hit women, you're strong enough for that, aren't you? It's a habit of yours!"

"Look out," he repeated, "I won't say it again. If you want a thrashing, I'll give it to you, don't be afraid."

"That's it," she said.

But Bébert suddenly turned his back on her and declared, very dignified: "Well, talk away, you get on my nerves! I'm not here to work so hard. Ah good God, no! After the brother, to have to put the sister in her place, thank you very much!"

The Red One lay awake the whole night beside him. She was indignant. She could not understand Bébert, and the questions she asked herself about him harassed her. What sort of a man was this to have so easily made up his mind not to beat her?

She was astonished, lost herself in conjectures, asked herself over and over again the same question. But the more she tried to answer it, the more useless was her effort.

She saw the dawn pierce through the shutters, grow, fill the room with a vague discolored

glimmer. She stared at this glimmer on the walls and the ceiling, and it tired her eyes. Then the light became clearer, shone between the thin wooden slats, and Irma listened to hear if Emile was getting up. It was time. The carts which were clattering in the streets ought to have awakened him. La Rouque was worried. She did not dare to go and see what Emile was doing for fear of being surprised by Bébert. She wondered if he was in pain, if he needed her. She was crushed by an immense discouragement.

At her side, Bébert was snoring open mouthed. His breath smelt strongly of rum and tobacco. Asleep he was unpleasant to look upon. He had had his hair cut the day before, and shaved on the temples, and this gave him an unfamiliar expression. A strange face which the girl discovered for the first time. Why had he cut his hair in that stupid fashion, like an American sailor? It was certainly not becoming, and did not beautify him.

But alas! Bébert was the same in everything. It had pleased him and there it was. He did not need any other reason. His only explanation

would be that he had wanted to do it. Besides, he did not give explanations.

Irma was reminded of the revolting way in which he had pulled his knife out and attacked Emile. Emile had said or done nothing to justify such an act. On the contrary. But Bébert had wanted to stab Emile several times with his knife and he had done it. It was his idea; he had been planning it for a long time, ever since the evening when he had come home and threatened the poor wretch. No one could have stopped him.

Neither God nor devil. It was no use fighting against his nature, a horrible nature which pushed him to evil. Afterwards he thought no more about what he had done, he had no regrets, no worries even.

"No! none," said La Rouque to herself. "As for regretting the harm he does, he does not care a bit."

She sighed, leant out of bed and looked at a watch she had on a chair near by to see the time. Then she slipped under the bedclothes, and

shiveringly pulled them high up round her throat.

The morning clamor came up from the street with its varied and familiar notes, the shutters of the shops clattered, taxis came out of a neighboring garage and passed one after the other. Then a second hand clothes dealer uttering his mournful cry: "Old clothes! Rags!"

Irma listened. She was waiting for Emile to call, so that she might go to him and have at least an excuse if Bébert got angry. But Emile did not move. It was strange. Irma feared that he had lost a great deal of blood during the night and was not able to call out. This idea tormented her.

At last, incapable of standing it any longer, she got up with a thousand precautions and ran to her brother's bedside.

"Emile," said Irma, as soon as she was in the room.

The girl approached him softly.

"Weren't you asleep?" said she.

He answered: "No, I was waiting for you to come . . ."

"And how are you?"

"It burns," he said in a feeble voice, "here in my shoulder and in my side."

"Don't be restless," whispered La Rouque, "don't move. . . . Have you been cold?"

"Yes, cold," said Emile painfully . . . "very cold . . . now still . . . I've I . . ."

"Hush," whispered Irma, "leave it to me . . . don't talk . . . you must not . . . you must be reasonable."

She arranged the creased bedclothes, raised the pillow.

"*Hein?*" whispered Emile. "Why did he beat me, it hurts?"

Fever was shaking him. He shivered. His teeth chattered, and as he wanted to explain where he felt pain. "No," said Irma, "don't talk, there! keep quiet, I'll nurse you, but you must be reasonable. Here look, your cuts are closed already, you will get well quickly."

"Yes, but I'm so cold . . . so cold . . ."

He whispered like a child: "And then somebody must let them know."

"What?"

"At my office."

"It's all right," the Red One assured him gently, "I'll go myself. Certainly one must let them know."

"A *pneumatique*," said Emile, "so that they may send a doctor. You'll go and post it."

"I'll go presently," said Irma.

She left him and went to heat some water, then came back with the basin and towels and began to wash him. But Emile thought of nothing but the *pneumatique* he wished to send, and he was only quieted when he had written it himself with a pencil, and given it to Irma. He was suffering less. La Rouque had washed and bandaged his wounds and given him a drop of black coffee.

Nevertheless the fever persisted, and at about eleven o'clock it got worse so suddenly, that Irma who had got back from the postoffice was on the point of going out again to call a doctor. Bébert hailed her.

"What is all this," he asked, "have you been out?"

Irma told him briefly what was the matter and Bébert tore himself out of bed and dressed: "Wait till I have seen him," he grumbled. "Don't upset yourself yet. A doctor won't know anything about it, and, between you and me, we must be careful. Just imagine the trouble we would have if Emile started explaining things."

Followed by Irma he went into the room, considered Emile, felt his pulse.

"Yes," he said, "it's annoying, but don't worry. We'll give him some quinine."

"I've just bought some on my way to the post office," Irma informed him.

"What post office?"

"The *pneu*," the girl answered. "He wanted to let them know that he could not come to his work."

"Well," said Bébert gruffly.

He scratched his head, and as Emile opened his eyes and recognized him: "Don't be frightened," he told him, "Irma and I are here to help you. Don't get ideas into your head, at any

rate. We are worried enough as it is."

"Oh! Oh!"

"Of course," continued Bébert, "your scratches itch a bit. But don't worry and don't move. What? You want to say something?"

"Monsieur Bébert," stammered Emile, "I don't . . ."

He suddenly moved sharply, and drawing back under the bedclothes, uttered a strident cry.

"Well, there," reproached Bébert, "I'm not touching you, I am not doing anything to you . . ."

"The . . . knife!" moaned Emile. "Oh no, I don't want . . . do . . . go away."

"Yes," said Irma, drawing Bébert aside, "go away. He thinks that we are going to hurt him again and he doesn't know what he's doing. Don't insist. What's the use?"

"On account of the doctor," replied Bébert seriously. "I want him to understand . . ."

"He's too tired."

"Listen," he ordered, "you must make him learn his lesson. Tell him that if he is ques-

tioned, he must say that he's been attacked in the street he doesn't know by whom. Otherwise, you as well as I, will get into trouble. Do you understand?"

"But the doctor won't ask him anything."

"He might," said Bébert. "We might just happen to strike a silly fool."

"Well, I'll speak to him," declared La Rouque. "I'll explain that Emile was stabbed in the street by a fellow. . . . Go, you can go without worrying, I'll arrange everything. Go. It's all right, and though you behaved in a way there is no word for, rely on me. I promise you that you can. I'll see it through."

XV

THE doctor sent by Emile's employer arrived at nightfall, and Irma began such long and confused explanations that he showed no desire whatever to ask questions. He contented himself with stating that Emile would not be able to go to his work for a fortnight, wrote out a prescription, and left his address.

Bébert who was listening at the door, felt much relieved. "You see," he announced joyfully to La Rouque, "wasn't I right to say that it would be nothing?"

"I like that better," she replied.

"I should think so! And what about me! Only," he declared, "when I say a thing, you've got to believe me. I don't like complications.

And as for using a knife without spoiling the person I use it on, I'm a good hand at it, better than any one . . . you bet!"

The life of everyday began again. Bébert joined Bouboule at the Tango bar, Irma her clients of the boulevard, and Emile, little by little, recovered, and could soon get up and walk.

On Irma's advice, he forgave Bébert and Bébert in return swore on oath to leave him alone. Peace seemed to be made between them, a lasting peace, when Emile, who avoided ever mentioning what had happened, noticed that the women downstairs talked about him when he came home, and stared at him in a peculiar way. He thought this most disagreeable. Why should these women interfere with him? Emile was surprised and uneasy, and he, who usually pretended not to notice them, observed them out of the corner of his eye, and tried to hear what they were saying.

Trou-de-Vrille and Nénette were the most talkative. "Look at him," whispered one. "Yes,"

said the other, "in his place I would have gone to the police—and quickly."

The first went on: "A b——— like that? He is too much of a coward."

Sometimes when they saw him looking at them, they would take advantage of it to talk very loud and exchange offensive remarks about Emile's person, his courage, his morals.

"Just imagine," Trou-de-Vrille declared one morning as Emile approached, "it seems that La Rouque gives him money."

"Gives who money?" asked Nénette, pretending not to understand.

"The gentleman in the pen and ink business."

"She must be in love with him."

"Of course," went on Trou-de-Vrille, "everyone to her taste . . . only if her man hears of it, there'll be another row, I give you my word."

"Well," said Nénette, "the b——— will shout murder again, but when it's all over, he'll keep his mouth shut, don't you think so?"

Emile had pretended to go upstairs, but he came back to hide in the passage and listen to

the two women. They saw him and began to laugh.

"Who are you talking about?" he asked them dryly.

"*Hé!* girls. Come along all of you, make haste. Here's somebody wants to talk to us."

"I want to talk to you two," said Emile pointing at Nénette and Trou-de-Vrille, "because . . ."

"Hou! Hou!"

"Because . . ."

"Spit it out," said Nénette, seizing his arm and pulling him outside. Emile pushed her away.

"Look here," she retorted, "can't you behave better than that?"

"He's trying to quarrel with us," asserted Trou-de-Vrille. "We weren't interfering with him. He began by calling us names, and now he wants to hit Nénette."

Emile, standing in the midst of the women, tried to answer them, but they drowned his voice with their shouts and their laughter, and

some of them pushed him from the back, pinched him, jostled him.

"Now then," he stuttered, "are you going to let me get upstairs?" Trou-de-Vrille came close up to him. She sent Emile's hat rolling on the ground with the point of her umbrella and declared: "Talking to women with your hat on, I've never heard of such a thing . . . Ah! there, now you're correct, you're a little gentleman, *hein?*"

"What do you want?"

"I warn you," said Emile, "that if you don't stop, I'll go . . ."

"Where will you go?" they exclaimed in chorus, amused by Emile's gestures, his furious air, his shrill voice . . . "To the station? To the end of the quay? Tell us."

"I'll call the police," cried Emile, "you can be sure of it . . . yes, the police . . ."

Insults and a peal of laughter greeted these words. But Nénette called for silence, obtained it, came forward and said: "Do you want to tell them why you were shouting for help the other night? Is that it?"

"Hold your tongue, I forbid you . . ." said Emile, trying to stop her. Trou-de-Vrille put her hand on his shoulder. "Why, little one," said she, "if you are coward enough to accept being half murdered without saying anything about it, then don't boast. We know what we know, and if you don't want to be worried, don't amuse yourself with talk about the police or else . . ."—she made a rascally gesture. "We'll give you away," achieved Nénette. Suddenly they all drew aside, and one of them picking up Emile's hat which was covered with mud, handed it to him. He took it mechanically, wiped it with his sleeve, said, "Thank you," then as a crowd was gathering, he turned on his heel and went away.

What an adventure! Emile did not dare tell Irma, for he feared that she would at once inform Bébert, but his secret was a burden to him, so heavy a burden that La Rouque noticed his gloom.

"You are worried about something?" she questioned. "What is it? Is it my fault?"

"No."

"Is it Bébert's fault?"

"No, it's nothing to do with Bébert," answered Emile. He was on the point of telling her everything, but stopped himself, grimaced a smile, and withdrew.

"He'll never change," said Irma to herself. "He's never satisfied, he never wants to talk . . ."

Then she thought no more about it.

Now Bébert had also noticed that Emile was again avoiding him and he was puzzled. He had not done anything to account for this change of mood.

It was inexplicable. He searched his memory, asked himself why Emile should behave in such a way, and, as it was not in his nature to rack his brain for long, he said to La Rouque: "You know, there is something the matter with the Emile."

"Yes," said she, "I talked to him and could get nothing out of him."

"Well," concluded Bébert, "when it's your nature to bother other people and yourself, you can be killed and it does not change you."

Bébert was not wrong. Emile was really very depressed, and he had not the courage to explain matters. He dreaded being accused of making tittle-tattle in the house and this obliged him to be silent. He suffered, reproached himself with lack of self-confidence. Day followed day and misunderstandings accumulated.

Neither Bébert nor La Rouque really cared very much. Their opinion about Emile was already formed, and they did not change it, but Emile who feared everything, was continually expecting complications and did not know how to escape them.

"Well," he promised himself, "one day I'll tell them, I'll tell them what the women said."

But then it would be too late, and Emile knew it. Nobody would believe him. The facts would turn against him and condemn him. Why not speak frankly to Irma? Emile would sometimes reluctantly decide to do so. He swore to himself not to hesitate any longer, he prepared his phrases, then the women who every evening awaited him in the street with mocking smiles,

would take away his courage and he said nothing.

The poor wretch imagined that if he kept silence, a tacit agreement might be established between his tormenters and himself. This reassured him and gave him some hope. At times he persuaded himself that Nénette, for instance, who had threatened "to give him away" was grateful because he never answered her gibes otherwise than by looking at her with a meek and submissive expression. He was ready to give in about everything, as long as she did not spread her story about, and his cowardice was so evident that it nearly defeated its object.

In fact, as soon as Emile showed himself, Trou-de-Vrille would whistle shrilly through her teeth and beckon to the others. They would then all look round, ceasing to hail the passers-by, and following Emile with their eyes would confide their impressions to each other: "It's well trained that, Madame," observed one. "Bravo Nénette."

Trou-de-Vrille added: "And how polite, how well behaved."

"Yes," said Nénette, "he annoys me with it. My word! Is he cowardly to that point? I wouldn't have believed it." Emile did not flinch, he advanced as quickly as he could under the jests they flung at him, his head bent, ashamed.

Now amongst all the women, whom he ended by recognizing because they were invariably, every evening, in the same spot, he was astonished never to see Belle-Amour. Why was she not there? Emile made the remark several times. Yet formerly, when he came back from his office, he remembered that she had always been standing against the wall, motionless, waiting for he knew not what. Whatever the weather, she was always in the same place, in the same constrained attitude which contrasted so strongly with that of the other women. What had become of her? Emile repeatedly regretted her absence, and told himself with bitterness, that as his only ally was no longer there to defend him, he was not yet at the end of his troubles and must resign himself to them.

XVI

SOON he regretted her constantly, for the others became so aggressive, that on certain evenings they would prevent him from going upstairs. They insulted him in a thousand ways, they refused to let him pass till he gave ten *sous*, or they would pull his hair, slyly prick him with pins, hit him in the back with their umbrellas and run away laughing loudly.

Emile said nothing. He gave the money asked for, bore without complaint the annoyances of every kind to which he was exposed, and in his room would devour his shame bitterly and finally weep.

Tears were a relief he did not explain to

himself. They freed him from a pain so secret, so deep that afterwards he would imagine he was cured. But was he not the most abject of men to cry—at his age—because some prostitutes teased him? Would he never find the courage to rebel, to complain to the police, or, once for all, to give back blow for blow, insult for insult? Had it not been for the fear of Bébert and Irma, who would get to know the peculiar reports that had spread over the house, and would be furious, he would have done so. On the other hand, how could he fight alone against all those women?

He was incapable of it, they would attack and beat him, the scandal would become public.

Emile unhappily had not much choice. He was not master of the situation, for the alarming Bébert was mixed up with every plan he made. His wounds were too recent to allow him to forget the terrible little man. He saw Bébert pulling out his knife, showing it, then attacking him furiously and striking in spite of his cries, his complaints and his entreaties. The man was a monster. He had neither heart nor feelings,

and anything could be expected of him. Thinking about Bébert, Emile would feel a deadly cold freeze him to the marrow, and the sensation was enough to stop him when, exhausted with rage and humiliation, he was on the point of relating everything.

A few evenings afterwards, seated in the kitchen, Emile was sadly considering the affair when the door bell rang and made him start. He did not answer but wondered, astonished, who could wish to disturb him at that time of the night. Was it someone for Irma? Emile waited, went to the door. There was somebody on the landing. Emile was sure of it. The door bell rang a second time.

"Who's there?" said Emile.

A hoarse, stifled voice whispered: "Monsieur Emile, open the door."

"But who is it?"

"Belle-Amour," answered the voice. "I must speak to you. . . . D'you hear, Monsieur Emile? I mean you no harm and you know it."

Emile opened the door.

"What? What is it?" he asked quickly. "Why

are you here? I don't understand. . . . What do you want? Tell me . . . well, tell me."

Belle-Amour looked at him.

"Yes," he said, "here I am. Have you got something to say to me? Come into my room, I am listening."

"People must have a little pity, isn't that so?" began Belle-Amour, who expressed herself with difficulty and considered the room where she was standing with an uncertain eye.

"Pity?"

"Yes, yes," she replied.

"For what reason?"

She lowered her head.

"Well, tell me," said Emile abashed. "Explain yourself."

"Ah," moaned Belle-Amour, "I assure you that it's not my fault . . . that I did not mean to harm you. . . . My God, it happened, I don't know how, and you will blame me, won't you?"

"You ought," said Emile, "to speak more clearly if you want to be understood. What have you done?"

He considered her from head to foot as if to make certain that she was there, touched her gently on the shoulder, drew back silently. Belle-Amour was silent. She seemed to be drunk and in a strange state of exaltation for, at times, she trembled, agitated, then after making a great effort to speak, fell again into her dumbness. Her dress was wet and soiled with mud, her hair undone, and when Emile pressed her with questions, the poor woman fixed on him a look so shamed and desperate that he averted his eyes.

At last Belle-Amour took Emile's hand and putting it to her lips said in a broken voice: "It was when I heard you calling . . . for help . . . murder . . . the other night . . . yes . . . I thought I would go mad . . . oh yes . . . there was a man . . . in my room . . . he could tell you . . . I ran out . . . into the passage . . . and I answered at once. . . . He wanted me to came back . . . I said . . . no . . . let me alone . . . let me alone . . . I came up here and your screams hurt me . . . so much, my God! . . . Yes I was there, behind

the door . . . I heard everything . . . when he knocked you down . . . and afterwards . . . in your room . . . when he told . . . La Rouque . . . to bring water . . . and . . . salt . . . thick salt . . . to wash you. . . . It's a shame to have done that . . . shameful . . . cowardly. . . . Yes, M'sieu Emile . . . I was like a mad person . . . and then for three days . . . I didn't go out. Mad, I tell you. . . . What a horrible thing!"

"Shut up!" said Emile pushing her away.

He drew aside and cried.

"You? But you are worse than the others. . . . Ah shut your mouth! Yes, I understand now . . . I begin to understand . . . you repeated everything you heard while he was ill-treating me? You told those women in the street, didn't you? It's you . . ."

"I don't know," answered Belle-Amour.

"Of course," said Emile . . . "there . . . it's quite simple. It's through you that those creatures found out all they say downstairs when they see me. . . . *Hein?* I understand perfectly. . . . You don't know? But yes, you do

know . . . you know quite well and you are lying into the bargain." He grew heated. His little falsetto voice became more piercing, more grating.

Belle-Amour stopped her ears.

"It wasn't against you," she assured him, filled with an immense despair. "Believe me, I beg you, Monsieur Emile. I was afraid that he would be after you again one day and then . . ."

"Then what?" He stopped her angrily, then went on with renewed ardour: "You were not satisfied to poison my life and put everybody against me . . . you wanted something else . . . and you found it at last. You came up here because it's not enough that I'm insulted when I come home. . . . No, not enough . . . you must tell me all this . . . to play a comedy . . . Ah, you can be pleased with yourself. . . . Look at me, you have succeeded! . . . I . . . I."

"Monsieur Emile," said Belle-Amour gently.

"No."

"Monsieur Emile," she repeated dragging

herself towards him with clasped hands. . . . "You too, look at me. . . . Do I look as if I were lying? Can I be lying? Why don't you believe me?"

"Well," said Emile, "because I don't."

Belle-Amour looked at him.

Emile said: "The wrong you have done me can't be undone, can it? No one can take the blame away from you, so it would have been better to keep it to yourself."

"But," answered Belle-Amour with despair, "one can't, I could not."

"Of course not!"

"No, no," she declared. "Every evening when they torment you, I suffer . . . I am disgusted with myself . . . I tell myself that I am the cause of everything that's happening. . . . In my room I listen to all they do . . . and the way they laugh . . . their wickedness. Oh! you know, sometimes I would like to come out and protect you . . . and I don't dare. . . . I walk up and down my room . . . I tell myself it's all my fault for having spoken to them. I have no peace. When you go through

the passage after they've insulted you, I think of opening my door and calling you. . . . And then I can't, I haven't the courage."

Emile interrupted her.

He asked: "Your courage didn't fail you this evening, did it?"

"I needed some, you may be sure," said Belle-Amour, "to make up my mind. . . . At the end I could not bear it . . . I had to come . . . in spite of myself, without knowing, without understanding. It's just as I tell you, really . . . I am ashamed before you."

"What?"

"I am ashamed," she repeated.

He shrugged his shoulders, thrust his hands into his pockets, then basely, with a contemptuous sneer: "What's the matter with you," he asserted, "is that you have been drinking. You're drunk, aren't you? And naturally, people in that state don't know what they're doing. They go about saying anything that comes into their head . . . *hein* . . . isn't it true? Aren't you drunk?"

Belle-Amour was silent.

He contemplated the unhappy woman who was standing with downcast eyes and muttered: "Drunk . . . you're drunk . . . dead drunk."

"And what if I am?" replied Belle-Amour.

Emile stood erect and declared brutally: "I shouldn't advise you to talk in that tone, because I'm in my own place here and I'll put you outside."

"Well," said Belle-Amour, "just as you like, put me out . . ."

"I will if I want to."

"A drunken woman doesn't count," she went on speaking to herself. . . . "Why? Ah yes, I remember. . . . I drank so that I should dare to come and ask Monsieur Emile's pardon, but Monsieur Emile doesn't care a bit. . . . *Ou-la-la* my girl, so much the worse for you. . . . You shouldn't have got drunk. You should . . ."

"How long are you going on?"

Emile at the height of exasperation, approached Belle-Amour, seized her arm and shook her.

"Get out! quick!" he grunted. "That's

enough . . . your jabbering, your monkey talk . . . take them somewhere else and quickly! I don't want to see or hear any more of you. . . . Get off . . . or else I don't know what I'll do to you . . . I don't answer for myself."

"But," moaned Belle-Amour, who seemed then to come to her senses, "what have I said? What could I have said? You're angry with me." She tried to cling to Emile, clutched him.

"Well, well," she said as he was dragging her to the door, "your manners towards a woman are not very dignified."

Emile cried: "Oh get out. . . . Go off, *hein*?"

He managed, pushing her roughly, to put her out of the door, and with an effort, for she resisted him, he got her as far as the staircase.

XVII

TWO days passed. Emile, who in his despair and his shame had longed for Belle-Amour, now felt a bitter joy in remembering the scene when the wretched creature had come to plead with him. He was possessed by a growing rancour which forced him to find nourishment for his own torment in the sight of suffering. And it was the mysterious attraction of pain which made him, on the second evening, go to see Belle-Amour. Afterwards he went nearly every night. He shut himself up in her room for hours without speaking, except to harass the wretched creature with his jeers, and so revenge the wrongs he had suffered.

Belle-Amour did not answer. She lay on her bed, and looking now at Emile, now at the red flame of the lamp, admitted vaguely that it was necessary that all this should happen and in this way. At nightfall she waited for him, seated near the stove, drinking an execrable liqueur-brandy which she got from the neighboring public house. She would get drunk as she waited, and when he was late she half opened the door, surprised at not seeing him, and wondering anxiously what stopped him from coming. Emile's ill-treatment did not much matter to Belle-Amour. His sarcasms, his insults, even his blows. . . . The important thing was that he should be there.

For he beat her now. He delighted in hitting her when, his stock of arguments exhausted, he would notice that she was drunk. His rage forced him to attack her, and he insulted her as he struck as hard as he could, trying to hurt her and force her to cry. But Belle-Amour did not cry. She only heaved long sighs which might testify to pain or to an obscure and nameless pleasure.

"I'll kill you," Emile told her furiously. "D'you hear?" Then sometimes the wretched creature wept, but it was because she was drunk, and in her poor brain the idea of death evoked who knows what that was hideous and moving.

Tears trickled down her face, she wiped them away, and Emile saw her knotted, fleshless hands of an old woman and was disgusted by them.

Everything about this woman was odious to him. He thought of her only with the greatest repulsion. Nevertheless he went every night to see her, for in overcoming this repulsion he felt an emotion so profound and violent that it was almost pleasure. Obviously Emile did not exactly understand why this drunken half-mad creature attracted him irresistibly, or if he thought about it, it was not to confess secretly that he liked tormenting her but that she had deserved it.

However, at whatever hour he came home in the evening, the others in the street were waiting and they never seemed to tire of mocking him.

He walked as close to the walls as he could, hid in doorways and advanced only when he thought the way was clear, but it was quite in vain. All at once, one of the women would catch sight of him and call out, and they would all rush in his direction with laughter that made him shiver. Life had thus become a sort of nightmare to Emile, in which every day the different phases would correspond and repeat themselves. He divided it into two parts; the first, the peaceful and monotonous hours spent at the office; the second, which began with the night and which Emile dreaded as a sick man dreads the waking dream he enters and cannot escape. That strange moment, when he would wait in the street trying to pass the door without being seen was indeed almost unreal to Emile. How can it be explained? He had the idea that he was no longer himself, but his double, and he would watch all his own movements, register them, one after the other, with wonderful care and an extraordinary exactness which seemed to be forced on him. He saw himself opening the door and looking into his room, then

entering it silently and standing there for a long while in an embarrassed attitude. It was often half an hour before he could say a word, and as soon as he spoke or moved, the illusion of a dream would become so strong as to destroy all outward sensation. Another was saying in his place everything that he said, at least he believed so, and confusedly he relied on this other self over which he had no control, and whose reactions stupefied him. It was the same thing every night. Emile knew it, and if he tried no longer to resist, it was because he had been too long without sleep, and that his old habits were entirely lost.

"Ah, yes," he would moan sometimes, "to sleep. Not to have to go to that woman, in spite of myself! Sleep! Forget everything!" But he was afraid of sleep, for he found in it the same torment, the same faces, and woke still more dejected. After all he was always asleep or nearly so. That was the impression he gave, when coming down the stairs; he would pass people without seeing them. Irma had already noticed it. She had met Emile, and to her great

surprise noticed that he was in his slippers, without overcoat or hat, and talked incoherently. Where was he going? To which cafe? Irma could not leave a client to follow her brother, but she searched for him afterwards round about the Rue Letellier and the Rue Frémicourt and enquired for him everywhere.

But Emile was nowhere to be found. La Rouque was losing her time. None of the people she questioned could answer her. No, they had not seen Monsieur Emile.

"A tall man," said La Rouque, "with a yellow moustache and a sly expression. Not very agreeable." Everybody she asked shook their heads, and she went further, looking into every bar. It was the same everywhere, and at last La Rouque did not dare to trouble people with her questions any longer. Then one night Bébert accosted her in the street, and whispered mysteriously: "Come with me . . . but quietly . . . you'll laugh."

"What about?"

"At Emile," said Bébert.

He advanced on tip toe and made her a sign

to walk noiselessly along the wall. Then he stopped.

"Where is it?" asked La Rouque in a low voice.

"There . . . look . . ."

A thin gleam of light came through a slit in the shutters. Bébert pointed it out and laughed a little. Then he drew back and gave his place to La Rouque.

"No," she exclaimed, "it's Emile! I can't believe it."

"You can well be surprised!" answered Bébert.

La Rouque looked more closely.

"That horrible Belle-Amour," she murmured. "With Emile . . . all the same . . . it's disgusting.

"And what are they doing," asked Bébert, who wanted to look.

"Oh no," said Irma sickened, "I wouldn't have believed it."

She was speechless with astonishment, but like Bébert she began to laugh.

"Well, what are they doing?"

"They are lying down," she explained, "yes, they're well in the bed together."

"I think it is a very good thing," sneered Bébert. He forced La Rouque to stand aside, glued an eye to the slit and moved no more. Occasionally little jerks of laughter shook him, and attentive of the scene of which he was losing no detail, he remained motionless behind the shutters, close to Irma who surveyed the street.

"Bébert," said the girl suddenly, "that's enough, come along."

"Wait."

"I won't wait," she answered, saddened by the pleasure Bébert seemed to be taking. "If you don't come, I'll go."

"All right, go."

She had to pull Bébert, tear him from the spectacle which disgusted her and filled him with a cold joy. She pushed him forward.

"Listen," said he, "I have an idea."

"No, no," she protested, "they are not troubling us. What they do is their own business."

But Bébert went back. He knocked loudly on

the shutter, then shaking it as if he was trying to pull it down, he shouted:

"In the name of the law, I order . . ."

Irma tried to stop him.

"*Chut, chut!* shut up," he told her in the corridor. "Shut your mouth, don't talk so loud. Let it alone. They'll come . . . yes, yes, . . . wait a bit . . . Ah yes . . . there they are . . . there they are . . ."

The passage door opened.

"In the name of the law," repeated Bébert in a loud voice.

Emile, holding a lamp in his hand, bent in the direction of the voice.

"Bébert," called the Red One . . . "Oh no really, after all, this isn't a joke."

"Who are you looking for?" said Emile.

His lamp raised, he looked at Bébert and repeated: "Who? Well, speak!"

Bébert burst out laughing.

"Eh! Idiot!" he demanded, "don't you recognize me?"

"Ah, indeed," said Emile, "Monsieur Bébert."

"It looks like it."

Irma interrupted: "It's idiotic to disturb people like that," she declared. "Are you any further?"

"You too?" said Emile recognizing her. "Why, what's the matter?"

"But nothing at all," replied La Rouque. "Bébert thought it would be funny to tap on the shutter just now. It wasn't very intelligent."

"And the police?" questioned Emile mysteriously. "Are they outside?"

"The police?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're going strong!" said Bébert who after the first moment thought the misunderstanding very funny. . . . "There are no police here."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh don't worry!" replied Bébert. "Is it Belle-Amour makes you so funny?"

Emile was silent.

"And tell me," proceeded Bébert, "are you married to her? You don't say so! Without telling us, you living with the kid!"

He shook Emile gently by the shoulder.

"My compliments," he said in a sarcastic voice, "you know how to do things. . . . A blooming young thing, *hein*? Just someone to suit you. . . ."

"Yes," said Emile.

Bébert stopped abashed.

"Yes? Ah!" he said not knowing whether to take Emile seriously. . . .

"It's true, yes, yes, certainly. . . ."

But he recovered his self possession, and blowing out the lamp: "*Tiens*," he declared, "perhaps you haven't had a good look at your girl yet, well you won't risk being disappointed to-night at any rate."

XVIII

IRMA kept her impressions to herself, but the thought of Emile was now odious to her. She imagined him in bed with Belle-Amour and was disgusted.

However, for a whole week she said nothing about the matter, and when Bébert reminded her, sneering, of the details they had surprised, she felt a physical embarrassment which made her brother's presence unbearable to her.

In fact, La Rouque's feelings for Emile were such a mixture of blame, pity and disgust that on some evenings she was obliged to try and forget his existence, or she could not have borne him near her. She never spoke to him first, she

answered him reluctantly, and as shortly as possible, and sometimes she avoided looking at him. Emile did not notice it. He lived, apart from realities, in a strange world peopled by his fears, and his modest pleasures. What did Irma's attitude matter? He had something else to think about. At nightfall he became another man, at the mercy of the strange phenomenon of duplicating himself. And he welcomed it with delight. He gave way to it. The habit was formed, he submitted passively and it brought him in his torpor such strong and disconnected sensations that they governed him entirely. Irma was worried by the change she saw in Emile. He behaved as usual, but his gestures were becoming more and more jerkily mechanical, and La Rouque was alarmed. She would wait for him in the evening and try to stop him going out, to make him talk, to keep him company. It did not change matters. After two or three phrases, sometimes quite incoherent, he would get up and go downstairs to Belle-Amour.

"Listen," said Irma to him at last, "if you're in love, I don't discuss it, but Belle-Amour! To

be mixed up with her! Have you thought about it?"

Emile seemed absent-minded, distant, sly.

La Rouque went on: "How did it happen? Did you begin it?"

She shook him.

"Pardon," said Emile. "It wasn't me."

"Indeed," exclaimed La Rouque, "she had the cheek! Well, leave it to me. I'll talk to her when I see her. I'll make a row about it, you can be sure."

"You . . .?"

"I promise you that I will."

"Oh no," answered Emile with fear. . . . "I don't want . . . don't speak to her . . . you mustn't speak to her."

"Why?"

"Things," he stuttered, "gossip. . . . All sorts of things.'

"Ah?"

"Yes," said Emile.

La Rouque looked into his eyes fixedly, and for the first time for days he did not turn his head away, but met her eyes and muttered very

quickly: "If I were sure that you wouldn't say anything, I would explain."

"Say anything, to who? To that woman?"

"No, to Bébert."

It was Irma's turn to feel disturbed, but she hid her uneasiness, and asked: "Bébert? I don't understand. What has he got to do with it? Is he mixed up with it?"

Emile tried to free himself.

"You've said too much," declared Irma holding him by the lapel of his jacket. "Go on now, tell me."

"Oh," he begged, "leave me alone."

"No."

"Irma!"

Irma took his hand and pressed it, then said in a persuasive voice: "If you know," she confessed, "the way Bébert behaves to me now, you'd trust me, you'd believe that I won't repeat anything."

"What?"

"He doesn't care for me any more," said Irma sadly. "He runs after all the women he meets and I am only good enough to give him my

sous. . . . Otherwise he would let me drop, I can tell you. . . . I see clearly what he's after. And I can't be angry with him, he's got hold of me."

Emile opened his eyes widely: "He has got hold of me," sighed La Rouque. "He does whatever he likes with me, good or bad, anything. It's not pleasant to have to say so, but as soon as he orders me, I obey. He only has to order. Do I know how it happened? It happened like that, gradually, without my noticing it, do you understand?"

"I too," replied Emile.

He pulled his moustache mechanically, crumpled it in his hand, kneaded it.

"Without my noticing it," he repeated wearily, "the same thing."

"It's like that, isn't it?"

"Against my will," said Emile.

Irma said in her turn: "There is nothing to be done, it's impossible."

They looked silently at each other, embarrassed because they had confessed their secret thoughts, and astonished, almost overwhelmed,

because they were so much alike. Irma could hardly believe it. She drew Emile to her, and suddenly pressing him in her arms. "It's taken me a long time," she confided, "to guess that you as well . . ."

"That we weren't happy?"

"Oh no, far from it," said the Red One with effort. "You see, sometimes I almost guessed . . . and other times I asked myself where I'd got the idea from. It worried me more than anything."

"I didn't dare."

Emile reproached her.

"But if you had dared . . ."

"Of course," moaned Irma, "if only we had once talked as we are talking now."

"I would have told you everything," said Emile. He pushed his sister aside feebly, and as she clung to him and tried to detain him:

"No," he groaned, "I can't explain now, that's enough. What more can we say? It won't change us."

"Why?"

"On account of Bébert," answered Emile in

a hollow voice. "As long as you can't live without him, you'll tell him everything."

"It depends," said Irma. "If I promised never to tell him . . ."

"You wouldn't keep your promise."

"I?"

Emile declared: "I tell you it's better to leave things as they are. There would be trouble with him again, and he wouldn't forgive me. Yes. . . . . Yes. . . ."

Irma held him back.

"There," he begged, "don't begin to worry me like the others do. . . . I don't want to say anything. . . ."

"You must," said La Rouque . . . "absolutely. You began just now, you must go on."

"We'll see."

"Oh but you must," she affirmed . . . "Come, Emile, tell me, trust me."

He struggled, loosened the Red One's clasp, escaped from her, then coming back: "Don't insist," he said in an irritated tone of voice. "I've told you that I don't want to say anything."

"But why, Emile . . . why?"

He murmured: "Nothing."

Suddenly he added as if to himself: "From the others I have borne it, up to now . . . but from you . . . no . . . but no . . . don't imagine that I'll accept it . . . do you know . . . never."

He began to stamp, seized by an inexplicable wrath that now exalted and now dejected him. He shouted, he swore, he reproached Irma with wishing to torment him, and tear him to pieces like the others did.

"What others?" asked Irma.

Emile became uneasy.

"You're there," said the girl, "putting yourself in a state and talking a lot of nonsense, it is not common sense, keep quiet—I haven't any idea of harming you. What harm? What has hurt you?"

"Downstairs," answered Emile in a low voice.

Irma looked at him with an expression of disgust and triumph.

"Really," she said, "that woman?"

"Which woman?"

"The Belle-Amour, of course."

"No," groaned Emile, "not Belle-Amour. The women who wait for me every evening in the street, those . . ."

"*Hé?*" interrupted La Rouque, "have they been troubling you?"

Emile started. He stood motionless, and silent, darting suspicious looks about the room. He was trembling and observed Irma fearfully.

She shook her head.

"There," she told him gently. "Don't think about it? Don't think about it any more. It's not worth while putting yourself in such a state. It doesn't help matters."

"Yes, yes," he muttered, "of course. Only if you saw how they are all after me, you'd understand. They'll send me mad, d'you hear? I don't know what will happen."

He began to scream: "I don't know, something will happen. That's sure and certain. They'll drive me to it. They'll force me to it."

Irma took him by the shoulders.

"There, Emile."

He sighed deeply.

"You're not yourself any longer. Why do you scream like that? It's ridiculous."

"What?" he replied. "What is the matter?"

"The matter is that I won't see you in such a state," said Irma. "Pull yourself together. You frighten me screaming in that way. Nobody's doing anything to you now. Look, it's me, Irma."

"Yes," said Emile.

He looked at La Rouque for a long time open mouthed, then, hiding his face in his hands, uttered an indistinct moan.

"There, you are beginning all over again," said Irma discouraged.

"But stop it. What's the matter, Emile? Try to have some self-respect."

"They. . . . They . . ." he stuttered . . . "Those . . . all those women . . ." And suddenly, seized by an immense longing to confide in her, to unburden himself, he told Irma everything. He related his troubles and what had happened on the evening when Nénette and Trou-de-Vrille had threatened to tell the "coppers" what they knew. He spoke with volubility,

interrupting his story with long complaints, accompanying it with gestures, repeating himself.

La Rouque stupefied, let him tell his incoherent tale, sometimes only half understanding it, for he repeated himself so often, magnified certain facts, went back to them, was unable to talk connectedly. Sometimes she guessed beforehand what he was going to say. She listened till the end, without interruption, but when he had finished, she said in a quiet voice, which contrasted strangely with her brother's: "Well, we'll go downstairs together presently, and you see I'll talk to them."

"They'll go to the police!" said Emile alarmed.

"The police? Don't be afraid of that," she answered quietly. "Not at all, not one of them would risk it. Only," she exacted, "not a word to anybody, *hein*? Or Bébert will take it in hand."

XIX

ÉMILE did not go to see Belle-Amour that evening, for Irma took him into the street and explained matters in such a way that the women at once changed their tone, and even made excuses.

"We didn't know," declared the Nénette. "We thought you didn't care for your brother. We thought he had told you everything."

Emile said nothing.

Trou-de-Vrille tried to explain: "If he hadn't begun to quarrel with us . . ."

Irma cut her short.

"That's enough," she declared . . . "begun or not begun, you'll leave him alone now. Is that understood?"

"Yes, it's understood," they answered.

"Well, don't start again," said La Rouque, "or else, I warn you, you'll have my man to deal with."

La Nénette said, vexed: "There is no need for a man to settle this affair. We girls can talk to you, and when we have said something" . . . She spat in front of her: "We don't go back on it, there!"

Emile was abashed. He walked away, passed the closed shop windows, taking small steps, and arrived at the Rue du Commerce. Ten o'clock. It was raining. On either side of the street, low one-storyed buildings succeeded each other with their old tile roofs surmounted by advertisement placards.

Dark colored shutters contrasted crudely with the whitewash of the house fronts; some were green, others yellow or chestnut, and here and there high chimneys of sheet iron were silhouetted against the reddening sky. The further Emile advanced in the direction of the boulevard, the lighter it became. To the right was a gleam of livid pink which shone through the

leafless trees whose boughs stood out sharply against the brick walls of the Métro. Emile saw reddish vapors which seemed to cross the street very low down, and soon he heard the nasal music of barrel organs, the sound of bells, of cymbals, of big drums, of sudden detonations, the persistent panting of motors, and all at once the piercing shriek of a hooter. It was the fair of Vaugirard, spreading with its booths and merry-go-rounds from the Boulevard Pasteur to the Avenue de La Motte Picquet.

"But, of course, it's true," said Emile . . . "what was I thinking about?"

He turned round the corner of the Rue du Commerce, where, inside a bar, which was brilliantly lit up, and ornamented with mirrors, humble people, soldiers with servant girls, Japanese and Moroccan workmen, dressed in the European fashion, were listening to a phonograph. Emile noticed that postcards were sold in this bar as in the cafés adjoining suburban railway stations. The café Pierrot opposite, with its long terraces where stoves were burning, was also packed with clients. There were people

everywhere, and when the tramways which grazed the pavements passed with a precipitate rolling of wheels and tinkling of bells, all sorts of men and women, some carrying children in their arms, stepped back quickly.

A patient crowd was penned under the Métro gallery between two rows of shops. Emile joined it mechanically, crushing the dusty gravel with his feet, and was carried up the boulevard, stopping from time to time. He thought about nothing, he was lost in the crowd, which dragged him with it, and at certain moments obliged him to stand still and mark time.

Most of his neighbors promenaded hatless young girls, and under their caps their faces were ravaged. There were many foreigners amongst them: swarthy Arabs, Chinese, Italians with short black moustaches, filthy Spaniards, Russians with reddened eyelids lacking eyelashes, Germans, fat Belgians. All were looking at the women and the lights, with rapture, smiling. They were dirty, in their working clothes, and satisfied to walk like that, glued one to the other, pressed together, elbowing each other.

They surrounded Emile on all sides. He looked also at the booths made of painted canvas, the pearls, the glass decorations of the merry-go-rounds, their gilded organ pipes, and their animated crowds; the interiors of the shooting galleries, where the targets, the stone pipes, the egg dancing on a jet of water, the landscapes painted in faded colors made up a fairyland of banal and incoherent luxury. . . . Nothing interested him. The menageries with their pungent smell of animals and acetylene, the sweet shops with their pale serpents of marshmallow coiled up and stuck upon metallic hooks, the lotteries with their odd display of champagne bottles, soup tureens, dolls, kitchen utensils, lamps, toys, ornamented lamp-shades, napkin rings, all laid upon the steps decorated with turkey-red cloth; the games of massacre, the *Musée Dupuytren* (the show of anatomical curiosities), the palace of dancing, the wrestlers' boards, he threw an indifferent glance at them as he passed, then went on his way without looking round. . . .

What did these people matter to him, the

shops, the lights, the incoherent and blaring noises? Nothing was able to touch him or divert him from himself and the odd sensation, which had possessed him ever since he had decided to tell Irma about his troubles. It was strange. Emile amidst the crowd, felt as though he were deprived of strength and life.

He was not conscious of living, or so dimly, that he had the impression of not realizing what his existence meant. He really could not imagine, for he was emptied so to speak of everything that had made life: his torment, his fears, his rendez-vous with Belle-Amour. Emptied or robbed perhaps of all the motives which made him think, act, connect his thoughts and his deeds. He did not explain the state he was in to himself, or know the reason of it, he did not even manage to grasp it, and, strangely enough with such a simple being, he minded not at all. He arrived, still buffeted by the crowd at the Place Cambronne, and suddenly he perceived that it was raining: Emile felt his coat and his hat, was astonished to find them wet, and coughed a little. The rain in the light of

the electric globes fell obliquely, silently, and very far off in the night it made the road and the pavement glisten. "There," thought Emile, "it's pouring! Where shall I go now?" He retraced his steps, walking along the bars and hotels.

He forgot that it was raining, took no notice of it, and strolled along, without haste. On the left was the Tango bar and just before it No. 162. Emile recognized the house-front with its colored window-panes and heard the automatic piano, but he did not stop. He soon reached, and passed the Tango bar, and went slowly on his way. He had no plan in his mind, and he cared very little if he followed that boulevard or another. Then at the corner of the Rue de l'Avre, Irma whom he had not seen hailed him.

"Are you going home?" she asked.

"I? No."

"Ah! All right . . ."

She nodded and smiled at a passer-by and as he did not answer, said in a low voice to Emile: "You had much better go home."

"Why?"

"Because," declared La Rouque, "you're soaked, look at yourself."

"It does not matter," said Emile, "I am going like this . . . to the fair!"

"Alone?"

"Naturally."

"And Bébert?" asked Irma. "You haven't met him?"

"Bébert?"

La Rouque explained: "I've been to Tango's to see him and he is not there. It's annoying to look for him and not to find him. What do you think? He must be in one of the booths, shooting, while I am wearing myself out here with my feet in the water."

Emile was about to speak.

"There, there . . . go away," said La Rouque quickly, "here are people coming."

And she crossed the road to accost, opposite, an American sailor who was standing against the wall laughing to himself and counting up dollars in his little cap.

Emile went his way, but he turned back sev-

eral times to see if La Rouque had decided the sailor to follow her, stopped, waited. They disappeared at last, together. Emile felt relieved. He went off again. Women, placed at intervals under the lamps of a hotel, accosted him.

"But no," grunted Emile.

He went sadly along the houses, the collar of his overcoat turned up, both hands in his pockets, and just when he was thinking least about it, he found himself face to face, on the step of a house, with a woman, who without saying a word seized him by the sleeve and pulled him inside.

"Well, what is it?" he protested.

The woman shut the door.

"You will drink a glass?" she asked.

Emile wished to go.

"Oh come, you have time enough for that," the creature assured him. "Take a bock, it's five *sous*."

He perceived two other women, and, wallowing on shabby benches, several individuals, half asleep, who looked at him without moving.

A horse-shoe shaped bar took up a great part of the space and in the background lit by a petroleum lamp, one could see a room with a bed in it and a dirty old curtain.

Emile drank silently, standing at the bar; the woman whispered to him: "Will you stay a moment?"

"I don't want to," said Emile.

"We'd go into the room," she proposed, "we'd be all right there. You'll see. We'd only have to draw the curtain. You don't want to?"

"No, I don't."

"Then you'll pay for a bock?"

She poured it out herself, picked up the piece of fifty centimes which Emile threw on the counter, emptied her glass, then half opening the door, continued her singular traffic without any great success.

"*Salut*," said Emile.

The woman winked at him: "You will come again, won't you?" she whispered. "One evening or in the afternoon when you are free. You would take the two women with you? *Hein*?"

"Yes, yes . . . another time," Emile assured her. "That's it, it's understood."

He came out of the shop—it had as sign-board the words, "Aux Belles Poules"—in an indescribable state of stupor and prostration.

"It's not believable," he told himself with disgust, "a nest of vermin, of disease."

The thought of this place, which he had entered unawares, pursued him. When he thrust it aside it returned, and so vividly that he was forced to remember the details. Those men for instance, lying brutishly on the benches, those creatures wearing torn and filthy black silk dresses, the room in the dim lamp light, the counter, the looking-glasses eaten away by a grey leprosy, the smell, the atmosphere of the place, all this he evoked in spite of himself. Then he thought of Irma with the American sailor, and felt a strange pain which he could not explain.

Certainly at first sight, no comparison was possible between La Rouque and the sordid prostitutes of the "Belles Poules," but Emile ended by telling himself that the difference was

not so great as he had imagined. He despised himself for the thought. He felt vexed, humiliated. La Rouque was worth a thousand times more than those women. She was free. She could choose her clients whereas they had not even the possibility of doing so, and thus were more degraded.

He did not pity them, on the contrary, he felt angry with them, because they reminded him of his sister and the profession she had chosen, for, now that he had seen her at work, he felt a sickly commiseration for her. Whatever he did, his mind always returned to her, and he judged her, and this was so painful to him, that at length he crossed over to the other side of the street, went towards the fair, and mixing with the crowd, continued his interrupted promenade.

But it was already past eleven o'clock, and soon the half hour struck. Emile wandered under the vaulted roof of the Métro gallery. The crowd was not so thick, and circulated at its ease. He walked unconsciously. The lights were going out, the covers were put on the organs, the shutters were drawn over the photographer's

show case. Only the report of the guns craking was heard in the half silence, and the sound of the wind shaking the canvas made a confused, splashing noise.

Girls crossed the street blowing wooden trumpets. They were accompanied by men in sweaters, the collar and sleeves showing under their mackintoshes. Some of them sang, others kissed their lovers. Emile followed them with his glance as far as the café Pierrot which they entered laughing. Then some Arabs, gathered in front of a three card trick player, scattered slowly one by one. There were only five or six shops still lighted up, a fortune teller under his big umbrella, and a little merry-go-round which was still working and on which a soldier was seated. Emile approached the merry-go-round. A motionless old man near a musical box was looking at his only client with a sulky expression. He invited Emile to take a turn, and, as Emile did not answer, pulled out his watch and looked at the time.

It was a ridiculous merry-go-round, the sort one sees on the beach in the summer or in the

squares to attract children. It was not lit up. The animals, rabbits, naturally, with erect ears, which seemed gigantic, were its only charm. Cabbages and enormous carrots were made into little coaches where one could sit down. Each of the rabbits wore round its neck a big bow of a different color, and a little bell, which did not ring and on which a name was inscribed in golden letters.

Emile could read as the rabbits went past him: *Janot, Jeannette, Mére-Lapine, Isidore,* and as he looked, an obscure feeling was born in him. He thought mechanically about a past so distant that he fell into an odd waking dream. He saw himself at the age when he had hoisted his little sister onto an identical merry-go-round.

Yes, at Belleville. It was the same merry-go-round and this same old man perhaps who was now yawning and seemed so weary. The music as well. He suddenly thought he recognized it because of the way it was playing. It was so weak, so feeble, so confidential that it seemed to be muffled, to be playing from somewhere very far off, out of time, out of the world.

Emile was filled with a great uneasiness, a great disturbance, an emotion at once sweet and bitter and heart-rending, and the old man, after he had put his oil-lamp out, and gazed at this individual who had been perplexing him for a long while, was obliged to touch him gently on the shoulder.

He said: "*Hé ben,* my little man, you'll have to go away, it's all over."

XX

EMILE went off at once taking long strides. He crossed the boulevard without noticing that he was on the wrong side and walking unconsciously, thinking of something else, he turned the corner of the café Pierrot, which was brilliantly lit, without recognizing it. Then he suddenly noticed a *brasserie* full of people and felt an irresistible longing for company. He went in, chose a table, sat down and looked at his neighbors.

A smell of cheroots, of pipes, of sour beer seized him by the throat. Emile was at first inconvenienced by it, but the couple on his right drew closer together to make room for him and

this attention touched him. He thanked them effusively.

On his left was seated a young man of dubious appearance who seemed sad and downcast. He gazed at Emile absent-mindedly and Emile surveyed him out of the corner of an eye. Then he called a waiter and ordered a glass of wine

"In this place," said the young man to whom Emile had not spoken, "most people drink beer yeast."

"Ah, why?"

"It purifies the blood," said the young man.

Emile did not answer. He began to look round the room. The people there were as a matter of fact absorbing beer yeast, a thick liquid which looked like soup. They smoked and played cards. The clients were mostly traders of the quarter with their wives at their side; prostitutes, gentlemen who lacked refinement, pale adolescents. Emile looked and listened. There was a loud buzzing in his ears which lulled and benumbed him, plunged him into a state which was almost sleep. Little by little he

forgot himself and was filled with a dull sensation of comfort.

"Yes," said the boy on his left slowly, "yeast is very good for boils and humor. People come to this *brasserie* on purpose for that."

"Ah, yes?"

"Of course," the unknown assured him.

Emile asked: "You as well? Do you come here for yeast?"

"As a matter of fact," said he, "I haven't come to drink yeast. I am here to meet a woman. D'you understand?"

He yawned, hid his face in his hands, then smiling sadly, declared: "Only she hasn't come, the bitch! She doesn't care! She's let me down."

"Oh no," said Emile gently, "have a little patience, ladies are always late. They want to be the more desired."

"Oh come!"

"Certainly."

The unknown shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't you believe me?" asked Emile. "Ladies . . ."

"That one," grunted the young men, "it would astonish me if she came."

"Why?"

"Because I'd shoot her if she did," he muttered. "*Va!* She knows it quite well and she won't risk it. I'd put a bullet in her."

"Why?"

"There, look at that," said the surprising individual plunging a hand into his pocket and bringing out a revolver.

Emile turned his head aside.

"With this plaything, *hein?*" went on the other, "there is a chance that I could give her her little lot, isn't there?"

"And then?"

"What then?"

"You," answered Emile who was bored by this conversation. "You'll be arrested."

The young man sneered. He hid his weapon, and staring at a vague spot in front of him: "I won't be arrested," he said fiercely, "that I assure you!"

"Go on," said Emile, "it doesn't depend on you."

"Sometimes . . ."

"That's not reasonable."

"I would kill myself," said the boy then, "and the proof . . ." He felt in the pockets of his jacket and pulled out several very crumpled documents, letters and envelopes, which he unfolded, and handed to Emile.

"Look at that——" coming closer on the bench . . . "this letter is for the police, to say that I've wilfully murdered the girl Poiremat, Cécile, and committed suicide. I've thought of everything. As for the letters, they are from Cécile."

He read over one of them, then, pointing at a sentence which he judged particularly offensive: "'What do you expect me to say, I can't belong to you as I did in the past, because with Albert my life is safer than with you. And he manages to make himself respected, Albert. He is just to everyone, serious, always polite. He is a reasonable man. He has promised to marry me. You never managed to make me happy or you didn't want to. I understand that you only

cared for my money and that as long as you could get it out of me . . .'

"The bitch!" exclaimed the reader in a hollow voice.

"'As long as you could get it out of me, it was all the same to you how I earned it. Think of how you used to treat me when I came home without a *sou*. The funny thing is that I put up with your ill-treatment for so long, but now it is no use to insist. I'm not afraid. Albert knows who you are, and he is ready to have it out with you when you want to, because if you try to bother me it will be quickly fixed.'"

"Would you believe it?" he said then, in a spiteful and toneless voice.

"You took her *sous* away?" asked Emile discreeetly. "Is that true?"

"*Bédame!*" exclaimed the young man, "you don't imagine that I would give her money! Ah, you are going strong all the same! You exaggerate!"

"No," said Emile. "In this letter, your friend complains that she wasn't happy with you. It's a good reason."

"What?"

"Well this woman, she wanted to be well considered, respected. She does not hide it from you." He added, as if regrettfully: "All women are like that . . . I know them . . . they've all got it in their heads that they want to be happy."

"Happy, happy!" repeated the other.

"Well, she says that in her letter."

"I'll give her being happy," answered the young man.

He picked up his papers silently and crammed them in a pocket. After which, in a tone of deep disillusion: "Firstly," he declared, "there is no question of being happy, when one sees what life is. It has no sense—that word—none. It's sufficient that one loves. Is anybody happy when they are in love? One does not even notice it. It's later on, that one gets that idea into one's skull, one is tormented . . ."

"Yes," said Emile, "however . . ."

But the other stopped him.

"You for instance," he questioned with ob-

vious contempt, "are you happy?"

"I don't know," retorted Emile who did not understand what his interlocutor was trying to get at. "It isn't very important."

"Well, if your girl was to betray you as mine has done, what would you do?"

Emile was dumfounded.

"Answer."

"But I haven't got a woman," he stuttered. "What do you want me to say? I live alone and work."

"And you never have had one?"

"I . . . I . . ."

"Oh come, you can talk, you know."

Emile felt uneasy, and was silent. He turned his head timidly, looked in another direction and all at once, stupefied, exclaimed: "Upon my word, Monsieur Bébert."

Bébert nodded to him.

He was sitting in company with a girl at a side table, and had not yet noticed Emile when the latter recognized him.

"What are you doing here?" said Bébert

quietly. Emile did not dare put the same question. He laughed foolishly.

"You're out on the spree?"

"Oh! not for long," explained Emile. "It was raining, I came to shelter."

"So did we," replied Bébert.

He called the waiter, and Emile during that time considered at leisure Bébert's new conquest who smiled impudently at him.

She was a dark girl, with large blue eyes and a very small mouth, who wore silk stockings and showed her legs far above the knee. Her dress was becoming. Her black curly hair was prettily cut on the nape of the neck and in a fringe on the forehead and she perpetually promenaded the tip of her tongue between two violently painted lips, moved it, wrinkled her nostrils.

"Who is it?" wondered Emile.

He lowered his nose sadly, drank a mouthful of wine; wiped his moustache. But Bébert was standing up. He came to Emile's table.

"Between men," he began cheerfully, "there's no need to hide things, is there? Will you have a drink with us?"

"Thank you," answered Emile, "I was just going."

"Just as you like," said Bébert. "Only"—and he winked—"you understand? Don't say you've seen me."

"Why? Aren't you coming home?"

"Of course. In a moment."

"Ah! All the better," said Emile. "I met Irma to-night, she was looking for you."

"You don't say so."

"I assure you."

"Well," declared Bébert. "Don't worry. It'll be all right when I go home. But keep your mouth shut. *Hein?* You promise——"

"Go on," said Emile shamefacedly, "don't be afraid. As far as I'm concerned, Irma won't be bothered. She'll never know anything. I promise you, Monsieur Bébert. Nothing. . . . Not that much . . . not a word. Not one. . . ."

At the same time he took money out of his purse, pushed it towards the waiter, gave him a tip.

"Agreed," said Bébert.

The two men shook hands, and Bébert added in a precise and detailed tone of voice: "And if you don't keep your promise, joking apart . . . I warn you, it will be so much the worse for you."

Five minutes afterwards Emile was outside. He understood nothing of this suite of disconnected events, he cursed them, and was wondering what he should do next when he saw under the arch of the Métro the little merry-go-round in front of which he had stopped. This put the finishing touch to his bewilderment. He remembered the emotion he had felt standing there listening to the music, then the old man who had approached him to say: "Well then, my little man . . ."

"Yes," he thought stupidly, "it is all over."

He established such a strange connection between these words and the meaning he gave them, that he thought the old man must have spoken to warn him particularly and give him time to prepare. But prepare for what? Emile did not know. He only felt that something in him was broken and destroyed forever, and the

more he thought about it, the more certain he felt this time it was the end. This idea moved him. It seemed unjust to him at first, intolerable; then he got used to it, for he felt all at once so utterly alone in life that he soon persuaded himself that he did not care for it, any way. What was he doing on earth? He was tired, discouraged, without strength, without will. If he disappeared, no one would regret it. No, no one. He left Irma behind, and Belle-Amour, perhaps. But they were women, and Emile thought he heard his neighbor of the *brasserie* sneer and declare that he was ready to murder his mistress and then kill himself. Why not? Emile began to ask himself seriously. The conversation he had had with the young man now acted morbidly on him, pursued him. He thought of the letter written by the girl Poiremat Cécile, and repeated her name aloud as he walked along. It seemed to him so natural and inevitable, that she should die from a revolver shot, that he saw her lying on the ground with blood on her temple which ran from the wound just as he had seen it run on the night when

Bébert had attacked and stabbed him.

"After all, it's like that, isn't it?" he told himself. "A lot of blood everywhere all round her." He imagined the scene, from first to last, with its tragic end with which, by a mysterious link he found himself narrowly connected. And he had to make a great effort to realize that it was only imagination.

It was the thought of blood which fascinated Emile and he remembered it with a kind of pleasure. Moreover, he thought of Bébert. He scented his presence in all this complicated affair which only was real to him because of the hate he felt for that cruel and strong willed little man. He felt Bébert's influence surrounding him, and it frightened him and made him unable to escape.

XXI

AT one o'clock in the morning Emile went home, and La Rouque, who was in bed, called him and asked if he knew where Bébert was. She said that she had been waiting at the Tango bar ever since midnight and he had not appeared.

"No," answered Emile, "I don't know."

"Usually," said the girl, "he is punctual. At twelve o'clock, one o'clock, he always joins me. It's not natural. Something has happened."

"What do you think can have happened?" replied Emile. "He must be with friends."

"What friends?"

"Monsieur Bouboule perhaps."

"Bouboule? No. He was at the Tango."

"Then I don't know," said Emile, "I can't think, but don't worry, he won't be much longer now."

He said good night to Irma, went to his room and was immediately assailed by the thought of Bébert. He could not succeed in getting to sleep, however hard he tried. He kept his eyes closed for a long while but in vain, a hundred alarming ideas were struggling in his brain. "Oh, I have had enough of it," he grumbled, "I've had enough." He heard La Rouque moving in her bed and her unhappiness touched him. Gradually he began to pity her, and to tell himself that everything was Bébert's fault, that if he were to disappear, life would return to its natural course; become calm and balanced. He was certain of it. This idea slowly took possession of him and he felt less lonely, less depressed. Bébert must disappear or leave La Rouque, and this after all might easily happen, for the little man had found another woman and had not yet come in. He certainly must have accompanied her home and stayed with her.

Emile could scarcely contain himself. He was

hoping that Bébert would spend the night with the woman and afterwards not dare to show himself to Irma. It was not impossible; on the contrary, it was in this way that things would happen, connect themselves, settle themselves.

Everything would end, inevitably, without any drama, by the suppression—for Emile—of Bébert, and he felt such a great relief that he longed to go and tell La Rouque, and explain matters to her. As a matter of fact, Bébert did not come home that night, or the days that followed. Irma ceased to exist. She searched for her lover in the bars, harassed Bouboule, wept for hours alone in her room and refused to be comforted. Her despair was terrible. Sometimes she would be enraged and shouted out a thousand insults, sometimes she would rap at Emile's door, sit near his bedside, sob like a soul in pain, and wipe her eyes.

"*Voyons*, Irma," said Emile, "be brave."

"No . . . let me alone . . . let me alone," she answered.

"But don't go on like that, he'll come back, he's not lost."

"Ah, you say so."

"Why shouldn't he come back?"

Irma blew her nose loudly, then shaking her head, she declared: "He's found somebody else . . . and you see . . . he doesn't care about me. He doesn't care a ——— He's a dirty beast, he's a mean swine."

Emile certainly did not think the contrary, but he kept his opinion to himself, for fear that Irma would reproach him for not upholding Bébert, for taking advantage of his absence to join in her abuse. Her reasons were women's reasons, unlike those of Emile. Emile, then, in order to guard against fate, took care not to say what he knew, for if he spoke—he thought—it would be sufficient to bring Bébert back. He was too happy to risk spoiling everything. Ah! no, no follies!

But on certain evenings, he was astonished not to see Bébert in the kitchen, or in Irma's room, and he counted the days, with the idea that on the eighth or ninth he would at last be able to rejoice freely and perhaps to show it. Until then, he promised himself not to show his feel-

ings, to say nothing that would compromise his own peace, though Irma often insisted and made him uneasy by asking questions which he hesitated to answer. He had wished for peace for too long a time to risk losing it. Not so stupid! He was not tempted to make the same mistake twice. After all, every man for himself, was sound sense.

Irma would console herself, she would forget Bébert and life would be sweet, even, and monotonous as in the past. Already, when he came home of an evening from his work, Emile was a different man. He had recovered his habits of punctuality, and by degrees, made himself respected by the stupid prostitutes who had formerly attacked him. He was so distant, so cold, so impassive that they did not recognize him. And Belle-Amour, who was pining away, asked herself with stupor the reason of the change.

Emile thought about her no more than if she had never existed and the wretched creature in her drunkenness thought that she had been dreaming.

Alas! Emile was soon to come to the same

conclusion. A dream! He had been dreaming! . . . for on the ninth night, precisely on the date he had fixed to himself, Bébert, who had been waiting in the street, accosted him.

"Come on," said Bébert, "we'll go up together."

Emile looked at him.

"Well what?" said Bébert, in a hollow voice, "here I am . . . I haven't broken anything. Don't you recognize me?"

"Oh yes," answered Emile sadly.

He climbed the stairs followed by his tormentor who whistled insolently, his hands in his pockets. However, on the landing, he stopped whistling and seizing Emile by an arm: "You haven't been blabbing at least?" he asked, "I've your word?"

"You have it," said Emile.

He opened the door, drew aside, so that Bébert could enter, and waited: "Ah Bébert!" cried Irma, "it's you? You my darling . . . it's you . . . Bébert!"

"It looks like it," responded Bébert with simplicity.

Irma burst into tears and, weeping, embraced the little man who held out his arms to her.

Then radiant: "Emile you see. . . . He's come back! Bébert! he's come back . . . he's here . . . . with me. . . . No. It's not possible. . . . I'm too happy. . . . Emile, come, make haste . . . but come. Come quick!"

"Yes, it is too much happiness," grunted Emile shutting the door.

That night they went out together and celebrated Bébert's return at great expense, in the different establishments of the Boulevard de Grenelle. One would have said that the place belonged to them; Irma paid royally. She asked for no explanations from Bébert. She kissed him every few moments, pressed herself against him, raved.

Emile accompanied them in silence. He had not the same reason for rejoicing as Irma. Far from it. But he put a good face on the matter and secretly in the depths of his heart made certain resolutions.

'What's the matter with you?" said Bébert

to him with sudden roughness. "Don't look like that. Are you upset about something?"

"Don't think that," he answered, "I am rather giddy. . . . All this row . . . this noise . . . it bewilders me."

"There. . . . Hop la. The merry-go-round," cried Irma.

It was the rabbit's merry-go-round, and immediately Emile was hoisted up by Bébert and found himself sitting astride on one of those animals. He was stupefied. However the merry-go-round began to turn to the shrill and old-fashioned music. Emile, who had Irma on his right, shut his eyes. An unutterable sadness seized him, contracted his throat. He held out his hand to Irma, and Irma took it, pressing it as she used to do when he had lifted her on this same merry-go-round, and stayed by her side so that she should not be frightened. "My God, was it possible?" Emile did not have to make any effort to remember that time. The memories came in crowds, by the hundred, gay, sad, light, impalpable, as shadows and he felt himself carried away in their midst against his will. They

rushed towards him from the distant past, with their pitiful smiles, their tears, their childish sorrows, vain and quickly forgotten. They fluttered round him, catching him up to join in a capricious dance, in which Emile sometimes thought that he recognized faces, and certain gestures. The faces of his father, of his mother, of his young sister, their familiar movements. He saw them through a mist, and they seemed to him to vanish as quickly as lightning, then to reappear. He was incapable of keeping them for a long time, they disappeared, mingled with other faces, other attitudes, which resembled them so strikingly, that he was astonished. Then it all disappeared in a cloud of golden dust.

Was Irma not having the same illusion? Emile did not dare ask her. But now it was he who held her hand, pressed it strongly, and did not wish to let it go.

He came down from his animal, feeling as if he were drunk and followed in the wake of Irma, who excited by the roar of the fair, talked of going in everywhere, laughed, shook him. He was very tired. He almost felt inclined to

weep, and when Bébert drew La Rouque to him and gave her a kiss, he would have liked to bite, and hung on her arm as heavily as possible.

"Well, *voyons*—come along," said Irma.

Bébert announced:

"If you hang on to her like that, we'll drop you, you are tiring her."

"No," answered La Rouque softly, "he isn't tiring me."

"Ah you see . . . you see . . ." said Emile in a sharp voice, "it's you . . . you can't stand me, you are starting all over again already."

"What is it all about?"

Irma said gently: "That's enough, Emile. Be reasonable for to-night. Now then, aren't you enjoying yourself?"

"He is dribbling with it," declared Bébert. "*Tiens!* Look at him. He can't stand me. It's worse than ever."

"Bébert!"

"What have I done to you?" asked Emile.

"Oh! that's enough."

"Well then good night!" cried Emile, beside himself. "I won't stand your criticizing me

any longer. I'll do what I like, and you have nothing to say about it."

"There, do you hear that," said Bébert to Irma. "The pig-headed! ——— Oh, he hasn't changed."

"So much the worse."

Irma tried to stop him.

"No," said Emile, "I'm going. It's better. I'm going. I leave you with him, Irma. Good night, good night."

And he disappeared running.

XXII

NEXT day Emile bought a revolver. It was Tuesday. He had the mechanism explained to him, came home, hid the weapon under his bolster, and spoke neither to La Rouque nor to Bébert. He had made up his mind, and wished to choose the time that would be most convenient. It would not matter if he had to wait several days. Emile knew that Bébert would not escape him, and he felt a diabolical joy in dragging out the affair, and repeating to himself that he alone could decide the moment to act. Nothing had yet happened to indicate this moment, but Emile felt it approaching, and he prepared himself with method and reflexion.

Now, when he shut himself up in his room in the evening and considered his Browning, he congratulated himself that it was automatic. In this way he had more chance of being able to carry out his plan. However, he never manipulated the revolver except with a thousand precautions. It was the first he had ever had in his life, and was an object with which he must first become familiar. He would place it on his bed or on the mantelpiece, then come closer and observe it, surprised that it was so easy a matter to give death.

His imagination was strained by daily meditation on the act he was to accomplish, and he saw himself pointing the barrel of the revolver at Bébert and pressing the trigger. He heard the shot. At the same time, he remembered the simplicity with which his neighbor of the *brasserie* had declared that he would shoot Cécile and kill himself afterwards, and it comforted him. He would follow the example of this individual, and though he personally had no wish to imitate him in "doing justice to himself" as the newspapers say, he made up his mind to keep

cool after he had done what had to be done.

He reached the end of the week in this way without betraying himself or his plan. Bébert, when they met in the kitchen or in the passage, never spoke to him. Irma, but only when she was sure that no one could surprise her, would wish Emile good night and advise him to look after his nerves.

"All right," he grunted, "it's not my fault."

"Of course," said the girl, "but after all, we have to live together and we can't go on quarrelling."

And, as Emile averted his eyes: "There," she promised, "it'll all be settled one day. I'll speak to him, you'll see . . ."

"Yes, we'll see," answered Emile. He went into his room, and standing in front of the looking-glass, looked at himself attentively. "We'll see, I promise you, everybody will see."

He sneered, passed his hand heavily over his face, yawned, nodded his head and occasionally, anxious to test his self-control, he obliged himself to forget the whole thing and put his various belongings in order.

This was now his chief occupation; he would carefully arrange on the dressing table one after the other, his soap, his tooth brush, his comb, his shaving brush, his razor, then he folded his old clothes and some linen in a cupboard, and spent a long time cleaning his shoes and making them shine. He brought a disconcerting zeal to bear on details which a man usually neglects, and in the end, the time passed surprisingly quickly without altering his resolution.

Thanks to this singular method, Emile was ready when he woke on Sunday a little after twelve. He got up at once, put on his socks and his trousers, then, his Browning in his hand, went towards the passage to go into Irma's room. Irma's door was locked. Emile had to go slowly back into his room, for he wished to surprise Bébert, so as not to miss him. If he called, he risked making him suspicious. This irritated him. Why was the door shut? He searched for the reason, asked himself a hundred questions and could not answer any of them, walked sadly up and down his room.

"Patience!" he told himself. "*Allons!* It's

not at the last moment . . ." He waited, standing with his revolver in his hand, for a part of the afternoon, walking, stopping, listening. Perhaps Bébert was asleep. It was cold. A damp cold. The daylight shone between the slats of the shutters—a daylight without gaiety. Emile strained his ears: he heard the rain fall outside with a confused, slithering noise and sometimes when the wind changed, it pattered against the shutters, now softly, now loudly. At last this noise of water acted strangely upon Emile, penetrated him, benumbed him. He had to make an effort to regain his clear-mindedness. Then he took out his watch, looked at the time, sat down, laid his Browning on the table ready to his hand, counted up to two hundred . . . three hundred, five hundred. . . . He began to be weary. . . .

By degrees the cold took possession of him, and he shivered all over. How was it that neither La Rouque nor Bébert were awake yet? He could not explain it to himself, and it provoked him, disarranged his plan.

"No, no," he declared aloud, "I won't draw

back now. I'll stick to it. It's today . . ."

"What are you saying," said a voice then, Irma's voice. "Are you talking to yourself?"

He did not answer.

"Emile," called the girl, "what is it, what is the matter?"

Bébert grunted.

"Nothing," said Emile, hoisting himself up on his legs awkwardly. "I'm asleep."

"Oh you're asleep!" said La Rouque, "you've been walking up and down for two hours. Aren't you finished? Go to bed, *voyons* . . . don't bother us all the time."

But Emile heard Bébert getting up, and he felt as it were, a shock full in the breast. He was stifling. His hands trembled.

In order not to let fall the weapon which he had immediately seized, he was obliged to lay it back by his side in the same place. And it frightened him now, it terrified him. He dared not take it up again for fear it should suddenly go off. He was conscious of nothing. He knew nothing. Nothing any more.

However, Bébert, who had put on his shoes,

came and went, and the unavoidable moment was near. Emile shrank, took hold of the Browning, made an immense effort.

"Don't be long," he heard Irma tell Bébert.

The door opened. Bébert went into the passage, stopped there to unhook his cap, took his time about it, turned the key in the keyhole of the entrance door, opened and shut it. Emile had not moved.

Then he understood that he was not able to do this deed, which for a week, he had sworn to himself to accomplish. He threw himself on the bed. It was beyond his strength. He could not. His courage failed him. He had then no courage? . . . Nothing . . . no energy . . . no strength? . . . He wept. . . . He lamented . . . he called to Irma for help. . . . He implored her to come . . . and suddenly when he saw her near him, upset, he pushed her roughly aside and began to insult her.

"It's you, yes," he screamed with an insane fury, "you, it's your fault. . . . Go away . . . go away. . . . Oh! For pity's sake don't stay

here. . . . Go! But go away. . . . Go to meet him . . ."

"But who? Meet who? Explain yourself! *Voyons!* Why did you call me?" she asked. "Are you mad?"

"Go to him! Go!"

"Who?"

"Bébert," said Emile, "he has gone, hasn't he? He's gone off?"

"Bébert?"

"Yes, answer, . . .he . . .he . . ."

Irma grasped nothing of this scene. She tried to explain to Emile that Bébert had gone down to fetch some rum and cigarettes, he did not listen to her. He stuttered words without connection, moaned, insisted that she should go away. Standing in her chemise, she tried to reason with him. She argued, determined not to yield, then all at once cried out and rushed towards the revolver.

"Ah! but no," said Emile seizing it, "that's mine."

"Emile!"

"Mine," he repeated . . . "*Hein?*"

Irma became livid, stretched out her hands, drew back towards the door but it was too late. The first bullet hit her in the stomach, then another, a third, and she collapsed heavily, whilst Emile emptied his revolver into her body, and suddenly, fell on his knees in tears and begged her pardon.

THE KNIFE

I

"YOU see, the affair wasn't finished when Monsieur Fernand had killed Borgeois," said young Mauvin to me in a confidential tone. Young Mauvin, nicknamed "Berlingot," was bringing me home to Aubervilliers. "There was also the question of the knife."

Berlingot shrugged his shoulders, and turning his head slightly in the direction of two policemen whom we had just passed:

"I can't bear those boys," he declared changing the speed of his car. "If I hadn't slowed down, they would have stopped me."

On the disjointed pavement full of holes, the truck pitched, jumped, leapt merrily. Berlingot laughed a little.

"It goes," said he, "but it's not afraid of anything as long as we are empty."

A charming fellow this Berlingot, and whenever his friends talk about him in the bars, he is held up as an example to the youngsters. He was barely nineteen when he no longer spent his time in the dancings where the boys of his age usually play at being terrors and commit a thousand follies.

Tall, pale, lean, an old cap falling down over his ears, he had franc by franc, without a woman helping him, gathered the sum necessary to buy the old car with which he undertook a delivery trade in the suburbs under the name, invented by himself, of Express-Rapide (and not such a bad name either, he added).

His good humor, his quick, practical intelligence, his shrewd looks imposed on most people. I had known him as a young scamp at Fauvette's where one dances the Java, and chance having thrown me in his way several times, we were great friends.

I went to him when I had any difficulty about visiting those dancings of Paris or its neighbor-

hood where strangers are distrusted. He introduced me with much authority and related many unlikely stories about me which were not even discussed. I had a right to be in all those places, where, to the nasal and plaintive music of the accordion, well-matched couples clasped each other, swaying, or gliding with small steps; and thanks to these dubious frequentations, I discovered many "combinations" which I kept to myself.

Banks of the Seine, the Marne, the Oise, and of the Qurcq and St. Denis canals, how many strange memories I have of you—thanks to young Berlingot! And you, secret and most exclusive haunts of the outer boulevards, "furnished houses" of decent appearance, cafés, cabarets, where loot is shared out, back rooms of certain bars only frequented by deserters and their sad companions, without Berlingot I should never have discovered nor named you.

This singular and benevolent guide anticipated my wishes. Sometimes it was in Montmartre, which after all I know fairly well, that he would suddenly open the door on some

strange assembly. Sometimes in the heart of Paris he would escort me to those public houses where stout gentlemen send "parcels" to South America, or else—and always thanks to him—it was by the most providential chance that I assisted at strange arrangements made in remote districts between distinguished gentlemen, their spouses, and those daughters of joy who wish to earn the money to free themselves.

I was therefore, on this winter's afternoon, once more indebted to Berlingot, and by his side was allowing myself to be thoroughly jolted, when he went on:

"But yes, m'sieu Francis, there was still the knife, and you cannot imagine what happened. Of course nobody understood a thing about it at first. M. Fernand, after what he had done, managed to complicate things, and no one dared give him away, because he was a bad man to cross, M. Fernand, and because his gang didn't laugh on every day of the week."

"What gang?"

At his steering wheel, young Mauvin winked, and increasing the speed in order to pass an

enormous cart laden with straw: "But the *Trois Boules* gang," he said seriously. "M. Fernand was the chief of it, and anybody who gave him away would not have been quiet for very long . . . you can believe me."

A thin jet of spittle punctuated these words and, as we passed through the long Rue d'Aubervilliers bordered by small villas, booths and public houses: "Look, it was over there," said my companion, pointing to a vague and deserted avenue on the right which lost itself in the fields. "It was there that Borgeois fell forward, his legs doubled up, and his two arms well apart from his body . . . about three o'clock . . . half past three in December. It was still light . . . and we were with some of the comrades in the Gillou waste ground, quite near by, where we were playing with snow. Then we noticed M. Fernand, who had a knife in his hand and was slipping away quickly. He was showing his knife to a little man called Flanelle who worked at the blue factory, and he was saying: 'Well! If he doesn't fall after what I put into him, I'll be astonished. I put it in up to the handle.'

"This open knife had a white handle, nickel plated . . . it seemed to me . . . in white metal . . . it was a small knife. Then M. Fernand and the other turned round, and M. Fernand said:

"'There, look, there he goes.'

"They were at one *metre* from us, and, looking in the direction they were pointing, we saw a fellow on the ground, on his stomach near the opening of a drain. We went to him. . . . I turned him on his back. . . . I lifted up his sweater . . . then the red blood began to run on to the snow through his sweater, and as this fellow had the death rattle we went away . . . I left the comrades. I went home . . ."

"But the story of the knife?" I asked.

"Well, wait! I mustn't get muddled, nor you . . . because when M. Fernand had to confess that he really was the author of the murder for which he had been arrested, he said that with such a small knife, he hadn't thought he would kill. You see? Altogether it measured hardly thirteen *centimetres*, that worthless knife, and the *commissaire* was well obliged to

admit that one does not kill a fellow with a thing like that. I tell you so. It was well thought out. However the coppers were not very pleased about it. Oh, they dribbled . . . and M. Fernand didn't mind telling them: 'How can you suppose that I did in Borgeois with a blade that hasn't even a stopping-notch? Go on, it's impossible . . . or then I had no luck.'"

Berlingot shook his head.

"Luck?" said he thoughtfully. "Does anybody know? One doesn't know. And the proof is that when nobody could show that M. Fernand had used another knife on the fellow, a woman claking was enough to do him in."

II

THIS strange narrative, to which I am not adding a word, fitted in with the atmosphere of that quarter of factories and manufactories where tall chimneys towered over the stunted and leafless trees. And the charming boy in whose company I was enjoying the doubtful springiness of his car knew how to make his effects, for he declared suddenly: "The woman was called Marie, and M. Fernand's pal had fallen in love with her. . . . Do you understand?"

"Not quite."

"You don't say so," said young Mauvin reproachfully, "don't you see that this pal of M. Fernand's spoke?"

"If he spoke," I said with conviction, "he's . . ."

"He's a dirt," said Berlingot forcefully, "even for a woman one hasn't the right to give a pal away. No, never. There's no woman worth it. Not the most beautiful of beautiful ones, and then. . . . Think! M. Fernand had told him everything and had given him secretly the real knife, you understand? The one he had used . . . and *dame!* as a long blade it existed —that one!"

Berlingot looked at me. His shining eyes, his pale face withered by precocious excess, his twisted, scornful lips allowed me to see deeply into his mind and guess the feelings that stirred him. Turned towards me he laughed, then gave three blasts on the hooter.

"What a blade," he declared admiringly . . . "enough to kill an ox. . . . It was showed at the trial, and although M. Fernand tried to say that it did not belong to him, there was nothing doing. He got twelve years' hard labor, and Flanelle five. It was expensive, don't you think so?"

"Perhaps."

"*Ou-la-la!* . . ." continued the astonishing personage. "After all . . . to have had that idea of hiding the weapon he had just used and showing in its place a boy's knife, and then to get twelve years! It disgusts me. . . . First, M. Fernand did not deserve twelve years. It's the other one, who spoke, who ought to have picked up the purge to teach him . . . but this other one came out of the affair white. In fact, he was very nearly complimented."

"Imagine," Berlingot went on after having told me the justly despised name of the individual, "that this swine . . . it was the same evening of the crime that M. Fernand found him in a bar and said to him: 'Marcel, can you stand by me?' 'Of course,' answers Marcel. 'I swear it.' Then M. Fernand explained everything to him and the Marcel took the knife and hid it quickly. Why did M. Fernand confide in Marcel? It was a mistake. But perhaps it annoyed him to keep that knife on him, and he did not want to throw it somewhere because it would certainly have been found again. . . . Well,

this mistake made, we won't speak of it anymore. But, *voila*, the Marcel comes out of the bar, and—so he told the judge—he felt all the evening just as if he were drunk, because he could touch in his pocket the knife that had been confided to him. He is only seventeen, the Marcel, and at that age it is stupid to imagine oneself a man. A man—he? The blood made him dizzy, he said, and made him see millions of lights all round him . . . that turned, that turned . . . like merry-go-rounds. Can you believe it!"

"He was afraid."

"Afraid? No. . . . I think on the contrary that it was a pleasure, but too strong a pleasure for him . . . it made him dizzy, it made him half mad. Then why did he handle the knife all the time, instead of trying not to think about it? One must not play with those things, especially when a pal trusts you and you have promised. . . . But, in spite of himself, the Marcel touched the handle of the knife and caressed it. . . . His hand went by itself into his pocket, and when he took it out, he would look to see if

there was not any blood on it. Several times under the gas lamps in the street he looked for blood on the tips of his fingers, and it excited him to tell himself that it was the blood of a man that M. Fernand had killed. In that way he got mad over it . . . he gave himself unreasonable ideas, the ideas of a child who takes things too seriously, who thinks it a great happiness to hold warm in his hands a weapon that has just been used. He had never before touched one like that, and he lost his head."

"Yes . . . he lost his head," repeated Berlingot eagerly, increasing the speed of his truck. "About nine o'clock, some of the comrades called out to him in the street and he went off without answering. He ran along the shops. . . . And the comrades thought: *Ben,*—what is the matter with Marcel? What's the matter with him? It didn't seem natural. But Marcel did not care a bit what they thought. The knife was heavy in his pocket, and he had handled it so much that it stuck to his fingers. I don't say that it's not a sensation. All the same, to watch him running along the walls, it certainly looked

funny, and if the police had seen him, they would have stopped him. He is a stupid one, between you and me . . . a silly fool . . . and everything in his head must have been upside down . . . unscrewed surely. . . . My God! That has no sense. To want to stand by a pal, and to betray him! I, who am talking to you, it would certainly not have happened to me. . . . Ah no . . . for a knife! You don't think it. But then I am not in love."

"That is a pity," I said discreetly.

Berlingot, busy with his brake, did not answer. A horrible grating sound preceded a sudden stop, then, the obstacle passed, the young man began to laugh.

"In love!" he exclaimed, and I saw his little eye observe me sideways. . . . "You're joking? Was M. Fernand in love? And Borgeois whom he killed? And all of them? . . . Flanelle? All the comrades? It has no sense. In love with whom? What was this woman the Marcel was crazy about? But less than nothing. . . . A woman double his age, and well settled down Rue du Pont-Tournant, with a type who works

at the slaughter houses. Can't you see it from here . . . the sort of thing . . . and the housekeeping life, mending her man's socks, and putting away *sous* on week days, to treat herself to a concert on Sundays. To love a woman like that . . . you must be born for it, you must have a special nature, not the good one, or else you must be half mad.

"*Tenez,* imagine the apartment: two rooms . . . the hanging lamp, the bed with an eiderdown, the gas oven, the oil cloth, four chairs . . . and the Marie in there, scraping potatoes. Does it excite you? Me hardly. But the Marcel, just thinking of Marie cleaning up that place, he would lose his appetite and feel his saliva under his tongue. Certainly she wasn't an ugly woman . . . that woman, but flabby, too quiet, too well behaved. . . . Women like that have no vice. . . . They don't like to be beaten and then possessed—like it worse than anything. . . . Or if they do, it's because they have trailed about when they were young here and there and learned to appreciate pleasure. . . . It was really not the case with this woman. . . . But

what do you want? Sometimes the idea of love takes you wrongly, and if you don't break everything you are lost . . . it doesn't forgive . . ."

We drove for a long moment without speaking and came in sight of the St. Denis canal. Night was falling, a lowering sky, uniformly grey, was reflected in the water.

Berlingot bore to the left.

"The Rue du Pont-Tournant," he informed me suddenly. A very short street, with a tobacco shop, then the bridge surmounted by the keeper's lodge. Berlingot slowed down. "About five o'clock in the morning of the next day," he told me, as we were crossing the bridge and swaying over the greenish water, "it was to that street that Marcel had to come back."

"And what did he do till the morning?"

"Bah! nothing . . . he drank in the public houses all by himself . . . two, three glasses one after the other . . . and then he went off, all alone, like that, walking straight in front of him. That night, the snow had begun to fall. . . . He didn't know. . . . He didn't see it. . . . What snow? When he arrived in a pub-

lic house, it seems he let it melt on him without shaking it off. At the end he was quite soaked, then he started off again, noticing no one and stopping sometimes to look at his fingers. . . . Eleven o'clock. . . . Twelve. . . . He was seen in a ball at Groseil's, where he did not dance . . . nor drink. It's too funny. The music stupefied him: he listened to it standing, with a sleepy expression. You can imagine the success he had! When he was questioned about this the day of the trial, he answered that the music made him feel as if he were at the cinema. . . . The more it played, the more he thought he saw a film being performed, a film, evidently, which wasn't there. But he saw it all the same and with it all sorts of new ideas which he could not have explained. There's what there is to be in love! Otherwise how could he have managed, Marcel, to imagine that he saw the Marie appear to him all at once? It seemed to him that on her as well, the sight of the knife would have a wonderful effect. . . . An idiotic idea. But he thought about it, he turned it over in his mind. Why should it not happen? he said to himself.

One has read more than that in the papers about crimes . . . and it tempted him, the Marcel, that idea of going to Marie's house and astonishing her by all he had to tell. . . . It tempted him . . . it made him tremble. . . . After the ball was shut, he went into a café which closes at about two o'clock and he sat down . . . he ordered hot wine."

Berlingot stopped, jumped down from his seat and searched for his tinder box.

"Just a minute," he informed me, "I must light up."

But where was the damned thing? Berlingot searched his pockets producing a thousand anomalous objects from which it really would have been difficult to extract a spark.

I handed him my matches.

"Thank you," said he.

A cool damp wind was blowing.

From my seat, bending over, I could see the dark house fronts, the black roofs, the low sky of winter.

"What are you looking at?" asked Berlingot.

He pointed with his finger at the Rue du Pont-Tournant.

"The fourth house," said he then, guessing my thoughts, "there is where Marie lives, opposite the gas lamp that they are just lighting . . . yes, on your left . . . and the Marcel, when he was turned out of the café, must have come along by the side of the water. He remembered it, and even that several times he wanted to throw the knife into the canal and get rid of it. . . . But when one is in the state the Marcel was in one doesn't do what one wishes. . . . He had to go to the end of his plan, and it disgusted him now . . . it worried him. Ah, surely it would have been better had he thrown it into the water, his knife! Then he wouldn't have turned and twisted it in his hands, promising himself to frighten Marie! But no, he didn't stop handling it . . . and now he took it out of his pocket, he opened the blade, and through the cold and the snow, it warmed his whole body to feel it, that blade that had sunk deep into the flesh of Borgeois."

While speaking to me, turned against the

wind, Berlingot was scratching, not very successfully, at my match-box. Now and then he made a movement, and the wind blew the match out. So he was silent a moment, attentive to what he was doing.

"That is all right," he said then. He regulated the two lights and took the wheel again.

III

WE were now rolling between brick walls blackened by the rain, the fog and the smoke of the factories. Blue and violet fires which fell perpendicularly from enormous electric lamps raised above the walls on iron and cement pylons, lit up everything with a cold and sparkling light.

On the left, before we had entered those strange streets pierced through the walls, I had seen other lights, green and red, fastened on the masts of the barges and promenading on the water, a misty white horizon, the black posts which supported kilometers of wire, and very far off barring the sky, the mass of the docks.

It began to rain. The pavements shone, strewn with zigzag reflections which accompanied us with their fleeting presence and made a hundred odd designs. The blue light of the lamps animated them sometimes with phosphorescent lightnings, and they travelled with us, on both sides of the car, lengthening, stretching a network of confused and entangled lines. From one street lamp to the next, these lines succeeded one another, continually receding, and I followed them with my eyes as in a train one follows the wires bordering the track. It was cold, the rain benumbed me, struck my face with its frozen needles, and I confess I was thinking less of the story of a knife that Berlingot was telling me, than of the strange scenery before me.

But for the disgusting smell of the factories that the wind was blowing back to us, the scenery would have appeared charming to me, but this smell at times was abominable and I was anxious to be no more inconvenienced by it. Then Berlingot, who was again thinking of his story, uttered an oath.

"Well," I said to him . . . "what is the matter?"

He shook his head.

"When I think," he grumbled, "of the way Marcel behaved, it puts me in a rage. Just imagine, it wasn't three o'clock in the morning when he left the banks of the canal to go towards the Rue du Pont-Tournant, and wander about in the snow with his ideas. Already the street was beginning to stir, the working people, men and women, were going to the factories still half asleep. Then Marcel watched for the Marie's man to go to the slaughter houses, and he went up to the third floor. . . . He knocked. . . . The dagger was open in the pocket of his jacket and stuck out, but Marie was too shocked at seeing Marcel walk into the place, to notice anything. 'What do you want?' she said to him, jumping out of bed. Marcel took off his cap. 'Eh! I say . . . don't wet the floor,' cried Marie. 'Don't come in here to dirty the place' . . ."

"And Marcel?" I questioned.

"Marcel, he was looking at her and he felt

a terrible feeling of cold in the bones . . . a weariness, an annoyance. Then Marie began to insult him and threatened to call for help if he didn't leave her. 'But I am not doing anything wrong,' answered Marcel at last. . . . 'I didn't come to do you any harm!' Then he came close to her, he threw away his cap which was inconveniencing him. 'Go away,' ordered the Marie, at once.

"Marcel was lost in astonishment. 'Where should I go?' 'Go away! Go away!' 'I don't want to,' he said . . . 'or you'll come with me . . .' Marie began to laugh: 'Go with you? I'm not mad.' 'Don't laugh . . . no, don't laugh . . .' repeated Marcel, '. . . I forbid you! d'you hear?' 'Why?'

"Then Marcel pulled the knife out of his pocket. 'There,' he explained, 'look'—He put the knife on the table, and Marie, all of a sudden, grew white . . . but white. . . . She had lost her senses at that moment, and Marcel was as white as she . . . and from the way he spoke quickly, quickly, without stopping, one would have thought that he was repeating a

lesson. 'Certainly,' she was thinking, 'he has been doing something . . .' But Marcel cooled down and said quietly: 'This knife belongs to M. Fernand, and M. Fernand, yesterday, in the afternoon, he plunged it up to the handle, in a man's breast' Ah! *Malheur*! . . . Why did he say that? Marie came to herself. She bent over the table.

"'It's still full of blood,' she cried. 'Yes, it's full of blood.'

"'Well then,' said she, 'take it back.'

"Then Marcel shook his head. 'I won't take it back,' he said in his turn, 'keep it. I give it to you. Don't you want to come down with me?'

"'It was pitiful to see him,' said the Marie later on in her declaration. 'He didn't want to go away, the knife was there on the table, the Marcel on the right. . . . I was on the other side of the table in my chemise . . . and we didn't speak again. We both looked at the open knife. . . . Then he picked up his cap. He put it on funnily. . . . 'Adieu,' I heard him say to me, 'I'm going alone.' And he went downstairs

without turning round. . . . I've never seen him since.'

"And Marie went to the police station?"

"It was her man," answered Berlingot. "At about nine o'clock, when he came home, the knife was where the Marcel had left it . . . and Marie told all the story. . . . Then they wrapped the damned knife up in a newspaper, and the man said to the Marie: 'Put your shoes on, we are going to take it over there.' Marie put on her shoes and her coat and they both went to the police station to tell what they knew.

"There . . . *Voila!*"

"*Hé*," I said gaily. . . . "D'you want my opinion, Berlingot? It's a lesson and even an excellent lesson. What an idea to confide in a scamp of Marcel's age?"

"It depends."

"The best thing," I went on, "is not to carry a knife at all."

"Naturally," answered Berlingot, with perfect docility. "A knife always gives you away

because of the blood on the blade and because one dirties oneself with it."

"But," he added, as the tramway I was going to take to Paris was nearing the station, brilliantly lit up, hissing hoarsely, and with a mauve-colored, dancing rosary of sparks at the end of its long pole: "Nobody wears that now —a knife."

He lifted the end of his sweater up with a sly expression, and showed me, solidly fixed to his belt, a leather sheath from which emerged the shining butt end of a revolver.

BENEDICTINE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
843C265P C001
PERVERSITY CHICAGO
3 2811 00082 6695